A
MEDLEY
OF SPORT

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A MEDLEY OF SPORT

WITH A MIGHTY SPLASH HOUNDS PLUNGE INTO THE WATER

Frontispiece

A MEDLEY OF SPORT

By J. M. M. B. DURHAM
"MARSHMAN"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY RALPH CLEAVER, F. S. COBURN, PAUL HARDY, FRANK SOUTHGATE, R.B.A. GEOFFREY STRAHAN, R.B.A., R. CATON WOODVILLE

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Dedication

To MY WIFE:

ONE OF THE BEST SPORTSWOMEN WHO EVER RODE TO HOUNDS, AND THE TRUEST FRIEND WHO EVER ENCOURAGED A MAN TO RIDE STRAIGHT AND STAUNCH THROUGH LIFE'S HARD RACE, I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE VOLUME OF SKETCHES.

"MARSHMAN"

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE writer of this volume of sketches makes no pretence to literary merit, nor does he pose as a "mighty Nimrod," for, although devoted to all branches of field sport from early boyhood, he has never risen above the rank of "average sportsman."

The author begs to acknowledge the courtesy of the proprietors of the undermentioned publications for permission to reprint many of the sketches which appear in these pages :—

The Field, Country Life, Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, Badminton Magazine, Baily's Magazine of Sports and Pastimes, Fores's Sporting Notes and Sketches, The Evening Standard, The Globe, The Daily Mail, C. B. Fry's Magazine, English Illustrated Magazine, South Africa, The Yachtsman, The Shooting Times, Forest and Stream (U.S.A.), *The Johannesburg Star, The Scottish Field* and *The Irish Field.*

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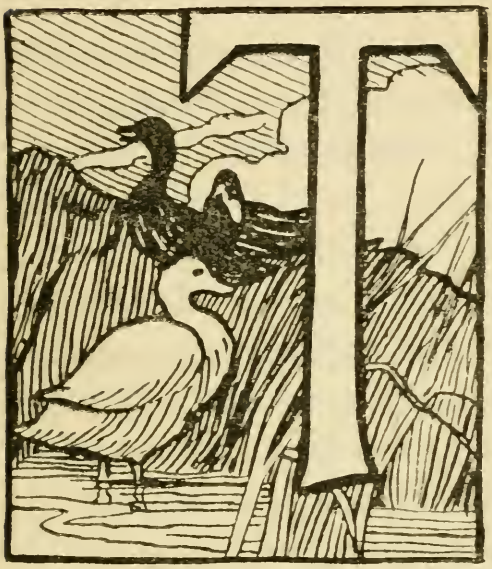
A MEDLEY OF SPORT

THE FIRST WIDGEON OF THE SEASON



THE little fishing hamlet of W—— is still wrapped in slumber, but the "foreign" duck are beginning to arrive in the estuary in considerable numbers, and Gaffer Gilson, the professional wild-fowler, goes blundering along the unlighted, old-time street, his heavy sea-boots making almost as much disturbance as a loosely "jointed" traction engine, as their ironbound soles strike upon the uneven cobblestones.

A long-barrelled, 4-bore duck gun, of antiquated pattern, is carried at the "slope" over the broad right shoulder of the old fowler, and in the "crook" of his left arm a pinfire 12-bore "cripple-stopper," the barrels of which are as bright as burnished silver, and the muzzles, from constant use, worn almost as thin as a sheet of notepaper.

The sickly yellow glimmer of a "rush dip" placed near

the window of a squat, red-brick cot brings Gaffer Gilson to a momentary halt. He lifts his rabbit-skin cap from his grizzled head, and muttering, "God bless 'ee, Mary, and bring ye safe through your trouble," proceeds with less clatter than before towards the ancient stone jetty, where the good rector's only son awaits his advent with the keen impatience of a youthful sportsman.

A long, low-sided, double-handed gunning-punt lies alongside the jetty, and having greeted the budding wild-fowler with a "Good-marnin', Maister Dick. A tidy lot o' furrin fowl come in last few days, and I doubt not some on 'em will be shelterin' in the crick after yesterday's nor'-easterly gale," Gilson clings to the coping of the jetty with both hands and drops with the agility of a young man on to the floor of the crank craft, which is scarcely discernible in the gloom of early morning. The shoulder guns are got aboard and stowed under the waterways, the youngster takes his place behind the big $1\frac{1}{2}$-in. bore stanchion gun, and the wind being off shore, and therefore a "soldier's breeze" for the fowlers, a handkerchief-like leg-o'-mutton sail is set on a broomstick of a mast, and, gradually gaining way, the flat-bottomed gunning-punt leaves the friendly shelter of the jetty and heads towards what appears to be a rift in a low, dark cloud, but which in reality is the mouth of a tidal creek flanked on either shore by high escarpments, which enclose and protect from the inroads of the North Sea a vast expanse of dyke and fleet intersected marshes.

. . . . . .

The light northerly breeze carries the gunning-punt up the sinuous low-way at fair speed, and Gaffer Gilson steers with unerring skill past every jut of ooze and black-ground. A heron rises like a grey phantom from the side of the gully, and, uttering a hoarse croak of alarm, he glides on his great wings to seek a quieter fishing ground.

The younger gunner might easily have stopped the feathered angler's flight with a dose of No. 5's from the "cripple-stopper," but, not possessing any great taste for roasted heron, he allows the graceful bird to go on its way unscathed, to the evident disgust of Gaffer Gilson, who grumbles audibly that "Maister Williams, the bird-stuffer, gives three bob for every frank-hern taken to him, to say nothin' about the breast of the bird, which be a wonderful sight better eatin' than a mallard or whaup."

Every now and again the cackling of a bunch of duck passing at no great distance gladdens the ears of the gunners, and as the head of the punt enters the creek a feathered hooligan of the mudflats in the form of a red-shank goes shrieking and scolding up the waterway. "Ah! that's right, ye cussed yelper, screech away, and let every blessed head o' fowl in the crick know as how the Gaffer's arter 'em. But mayhap he'll have a reckonin' with ye one fine day," growls old Gilson, as he runs the nose of the punt into a muddy gully amongst the saltings to load the heavy stanchion gun before exploring the higher reaches of the creek. The passage from the jetty has occupied some forty minutes, and the first grey tokens of dawn are beginning to appear on the

eastern skyline, although the lantern of the lightship isolated beyond the serrated edge of the treacherous sandbar shines almost as brightly as it did at midnight, and the lights of the fishing fleet trawling out upon the main dance and flicker like so many will-o'-the-wisps.

But the swivel gun is already charged, and the sailing gear neatly stowed under the foredeck, for the sail must give place to either setting-stick or paddle now that the more serious work of the morning is to commence. Keeping well under the left-hand shore of the little tidal river, which is fringed on either side by glass-wort covered saltings and treeless, wall-enclosed marshes, the old punt-gunner strains both ears and eyes for a sound or sight of fowl, and silently steers the tide-borne punt clear of every spit of saltings and tongue of slob.

"Hearken to they whaup, maister!" suddenly whispers Gilson to his companion as the shrill and unmistakable whe-oh of a widgeon breaks the dead silence of early morning.

"They be on the mullet shoal, I dare say; but don't 'ee pull the trigger-string till I do give the word," adds the old fowler, who once more gets to work with the setting-stick, while the younger man lies prone on the floor of the punt, with his eyes peering over the fore-coaming, and his right hand grasping the trigger-line, for at any moment the widgeon may spring from the tide or ooze.

By this time the light is sufficiently good to enable the fowlers to discern a small herd of curlew quartering a

patch of slob on the opposite side of the creek; but as yet not a sign is there to be seen of the widgeon. At length, however, a number of rotund forms are seen huddled together on a long, narrow spit about 250 yards ahead, and a laconic "Theer they be" from old Gilson puts the man behind the gun more than ever on the *qui vive.*

Foot by foot and yard by yard creeps the punt towards the company of widgeon, until they are almost within range of the big gun rigged in her bows, and still they do not appear to realise that death lurks so near at hand. But the clever old fowler takes advantage of every possible bit of cover afforded by the high saltings and mudbanks, close under which he steers with a skill bred of lifelong experience, and as he "sets" to his fowl dead up wind they are unable to scent the danger.

Suddenly up goes the head of the nearest sentinel, and the next moment the whole company—numbering some 400 birds—rises in a cloud. The wings of the widgeon have barely cleared the ground than twenty ounces of "Abbey B chilled" are sent into the "brown" of them, and when the smoke of the heavy charge of black powder clears away thirteen fat widgeon are discovered lying motionless on the glistening surface of the mud, while a leash of lively cripples vainly endeavour to rise and follow in the wake of their more fortunate fellows. The gunners watch for other birds to drop from the ranks as the remainder of the company fly seaward.

But never a widgeon is seen to falter in its flight. The wounded are soon put *hors de combat* with the "cripple-stopper." The slain are gathered, and Gaffer Gilson and his *protégé* toast "the first shot of the season" in a thimbleful of sloe gin.

A TRESPASS AND A TROUT

ET the reader picture to himself a stream limpid as crystal, with a gravelly bed, a swift current, and many a twist and curve as it flows through lush meadows, budding woods, rushy bottoms and magnificently timbered park lands, on its way to the sea. Or let him read Tennyson's beautiful poem, "The Brook," and unless he be utterly soulless he will see this little river flowing at his very feet.

Rising near the outskirts of a small Midland town, the river turns the ponderous wheels of no fewer than four old-time grist mills ere it has run two miles from its bubbling source among the chalk hills, while great quantities of deliciously crisp watercresses, both brown and green, are grown in its cool, clear depths and find a ready sale in the markets of Liverpool and Manchester. The tenants of the watercress beds pay a rental of £50 per acre to the riparian owners; but, as I have not the good fortune to own even one square inch of these

valuable water rights, I do not propose to enter into the subject of watercress growing as an industry. Suffice it to say it is a highly profitable business.

It was while wandering, or, rather, trespassing, along the banks of a lovely reach of this little river that I met with a benevolent-looking white-haired old gentleman "whipping" the stream with a 9-ft. split cane, a gossamer-like silk line, and a tiny midge of a March Brown tied upon the finest of fine-drawn gut. Trout (many of them goodly fish) were rising freely, and so intent was the venerable angler on endeavouring to 'tice the speckled beauties that he did not appear to notice my presence until I had approached to within a few yards of him, when, with a good deal more courtesy than I really deserved, he asked if I was aware of the fact that I was trespassing upon a private fishery.

Seeing that several notice-boards bearing the superscription, "Private Water — Trespassers will be Prosecuted," had confronted me at different points along the river, I could not but admit having knowingly committed an act of trespass, and somewhat lamely—albeit truthfully—excused myself on the ground that I had wandered from the king's highway in search of nature notes from which to write a spring sketch. As luck had it, just as I was bringing my unwonted flow of oratory to a close, Piscator rose and hooked a trout, which, judging from its fighting powers, I guessed to be a good one. After a tough battle the fish allowed itself to be drawn close into the high bank, and, taking up the

landing-net, which in the excitement of the moment the old gentleman had dropped, I had the capture—a fairly well-conditioned brown trout of nearly 1½ lb. weight—kicking on the grass in a "twinkling."

"My first trout this season," exclaimed the delighted angler, as he deftly unhooked the fish and laid it amongst a growth of cool, yellow-blossomed marsh marigolds growing on the margin of the stream. "And," added he with a smile, "I have to thank you, sir, for your goodness in landing it so skilfully."

To curtail a long story, in the course of conversation I learned that Mr B. rented a very charming cottage standing on the riverside, together with the sole fishing rights over some three-quarters of a mile of the water. This ideal little place forms his home during the summer months, and in late autumn he migrates with the swallows to sunnier climes.

"I find that a couple of hours with even a 6½-oz. rod are just as much as I am able to manage comfortably, and, having already exceeded that limit, will you do me the pleasure of taking my rod while I relieve you of the landing-net?" suddenly remarked my new acquaintance as we sat on the bank smoking and chatting and watching the swallows hawking for insects over the surface of the stream.

It was not without a slight feeling of embarrassment that I took the perfectly balanced split cane, for, apart from the fact of my being purely and simply a trespasser on the old gentleman's fishery, I am bound to

confess that he threw a far better and prettier dry fly than myself, and I therefore felt a little shy at displaying my inferior skill. But he who hesitates is lost, and, taking the rod from its owner, I essayed a longish cast over a small bay in the farther bank. The fly fell on the rippleless surface of the water with a splash sufficiently heavy to have scared all the fish in the neighbourhood out of appetite for feathers, steel and gut. With a kindly smile my companion encouraged me to do better things, nor did he so much as hint that the trout inhabiting the river C—— were too well educated to accept such a clumsily cast lure. My second attempt was a decided improvement upon the first, and the fly dropped on the water in a very natural manner under an outspreading bough of a fine old alder. It was immediately taken, and the next moment I knew I was in to a good fish. Up and down stream and across and across rushed the speckled beauty, now leaping out of the water and now "streaking" towards a cluster of dangerous-looking boulders, upon the jagged sides of which I momentarily expected to see him smash the fine-drawn point, "lock, stock and barrel." For fully eight minutes (to me it seemed an hour) did that game trout battle for freedom, but, despite his mad rushes and leapings, he failed to make good his escape, and, gallant fish though he was, he could not cope for ever against split cane, steel and tested gut. At length he lay gasping on the emerald turf at my feet, his lovely carmine spots vieing with the field-poppy in point of colour. Two pounds

and one ounce did that game fish scale, and, notwithstanding the earliness of the season, a more beautifully coloured or more shapely *Salmo fario* it had never been my pleasure to kill.

The scintillating spears of the setting sun now began to gild the summits of a distant range of purple hills, and, probably not caring to encounter the chill evening air, my kindly host led me across a beautiful level stretch of lawn to his old-fashioned creeper-clad fishing lodge. "Well, my young friend," said he, as we sat smoking and sipping a cool and refreshing soda and whisky in a small but cosily furnished smoking-room overlooking the river, "seeing that you have pleaded guilty to trespassing on my preserved water, I see no reason why you should not be penalised. However, I will allow you to go free this time, but" (shaking a warning finger at me) "when next you trespass on this little fishery, well, don't forget to bring a rod."

THE BALLYHILLY BEAGLES

THE little village of Ballyhilly was gay with bunting and a huge bonfire blazed on Bell Hill, for young Squire Egan had returned to the home of his fathers that day, after completing his education on the Continent. A brisk trade was being done at the "Ballyhilly Arms," where the members of the local pack of trencher-fed beagles had met to arrange the opening meet of the season, which was to take place the following Saturday.

"An' is it true what ye tell us, Denis, that the young Squire has put his hand in his pocket and given five goulden sovereigns to the dogs?"

"An' why shouldn't it be thrue?" answered Denis O'Grady, a veteran hare-hunter of some sixty-five winters, who probably knew more about the habits and haunts of Mistress Lepus than any other man for twenty miles round. "An' why shouldn't it be thrue, Micky? Sure an' you're dhrinking his honour's health out of that same five pounds this very minute; an' isn't it the illigant green coat wid the gilt buttons I've just been afther

ordhering wid Tim Daly, to lade the pack in for the Squire this saison ? "

" An' did the Squire ordher you breeches to match ? " asked one of the company.

" Did ye iver see a huntsman in green breeches, ye gossoon ? " replied Denis, scornfully. " One would think that ye grudged me the thrifle for the coat, after me taching ye all ye know about hare-hunting."

" Whisht, ye devils ! " shouted Pat Lynch, Denis's right-hand man in the field. " Sure, we've got to fix the 'lay on' for next Saturday"; adding with a knowing wink, " Let Denis look afther his colours himself."

In the Ballyhilly district hares were few and far between, as the estates were divided chiefly into small holdings, and the hares, therefore, very naturally fell a prey to the guns of the tenants. Denis, consequently, proposed that the opening meet should be held at Black Bog, a wide tract of sparsely populated swamp and moorland, which lay some six miles from the village of Ballyhilly. This proposal met with the warm approval of the rustic sportsmen, as a good day's hunting was assured to the Squire by the fixture.

On the appointed day, Denis, in all the glory of his new uniform, and surrounded by some seven or eight couples of hounds of all strains and heights, from twenty-inch harriers down to the smallest of rabbit-beagles, started out of the village, pursued by the good-natured witticisms of every Biddy and Molly from her doorsteps, to walk the six miles or so of steep road which lay between Ballyhilly

and Black Bog. Every now and again the old hunter would wind a loud call on his horn while passing some cottage or small farm on the road, and at the sound a fresh addition to the trencher-fed pack would be seen making its way across country towards the slashing green coat.

So staunch were the hounds that day, and so fast the runs, that the Squire's initiation to beagling was attended with but little success in the way of his gaining a knowledge of the craft of venery. But, upon taking leave of Denis and his companions, to ride back to the Hall, he expressed his warm appreciation of the sport they had shown him, and as a token of the same he handed Denis the wherewithal for him and the rest of the followers of the Ballyhilly beagles to "christen" the green coat. Right well did the jolly beaglers keep up the "christening."

The bells of the picturesque old parish church of Ballyhilly were calling the good folk to their morning devotions when Denis, in company with a few other members of the hunt, and followed by several couples of jaded-looking hounds, made his way up the village street. The worthy huntsman's coat had lost much of its pristine splendour, and in spite of the fact that he had pulled the peak of his somewhat rusty velvet cap well over the left eye, he was unable to hide the dark halo which encircled that organ of sight. In short, Denis and his friends had made a night of it, while their good dames at home nursed their wrath, and on the arrival of their

worthy spouses used their powers of persuasion to some effect. The Sunday homecoming of the hunters furnished scandal to the village gossips for days, to the detriment of the fair fame of the members of the hunt generally.

Some of the more mature heads amongst them, therefore, took counsel together, and used their influence that the next Saturday's meet should well be within the bounds of their own parish, not on the same ground as before, as had been previously arranged. The younger members remonstrated, "There wasn't a single hare in the parish to hunt." But they were speedily silenced and overawed by their elders. "Whisht," said Pat Lynch, "we've hunted before gossoons like ye iver saw the light, and here's ould Denis has 'raised' [found] hares on land where the larks looked big as turkeys, and where ye could have hunted an earwig from one march ditch to the other, for all the cover there was."

The Squire was advised of the change of ground, and, acting up to his promise of the preceding Saturday, put in an appearance at the meet, which was at Hogan's Cross-roads, and that day the dwellers in Ballyhilly heard the notes of the horn and the merry cry of the beagles within sound of their own doors.

Anxious to learn the art of hare-hunting, young Egan stuck close to old Denis, who had the reputation of knowing all that was to be learnt in that particular branch of the chase. Some likely-looking cover on a scrubby hill-side was first tried, but this proved blank, and during the working of the hounds the young Squire was introduced

to some astonishing facts relative to the habits of *Lepus hibernicus*, which it would be difficult to find in any work on natural history or sport.

A good hour was spent in drawing grassland, plough, stubble, and rush-covered bottoms, all of which proved as blank as did the hillside. At length the hounds were put into a large field of turnips, and they had not been working many minutes when Pat Lynch, who, by some extraordinary means, had detached himself from the rest of the field, gave a view "Holloa!" from a far corner of the turnip field. The pack, led by old "Doctor," flew to the "Holloa!" And no sooner were they laid on than with a burst of music they streamed across the next field, a big pasture, while every man strove his utmost to outpace his fellow. The Squire was the first to negotiate the stiff quickset fence, with Denis following close on his heels; nor were the other followers far behind, for all were keen as mustard. Over plough and fallow, springy turf, deeply-rutted bramble-fringed lanes, high banks and thorny hedges, led the chase; the racing of the little pack proclaiming a breast-high scent, and the music was almost incessant.

Hell for leather ran the field, but, run as they would, they were unable to keep on terms with the hounds. "Ould Pat Lynch is in over the head in the big flax-hole beyont," cried one of the followers, with an uproarious guffaw, as Denis's bosom friend fell neck over crop into a foully smelling flax-hole.

"Take thunderin' good care I don't sit beside him at

supper, for he'll stink like an ould weasel," replied the man addressed; and on they went again, seeing the unfortunate Pat had managed to pull himself safely to the bank.

For twenty minutes did that little pack of beagles run without a check, and almost as straight as they would have done had they been hunting a fox; so straight, indeed, that some of the older hands began to wonder of what nature the quarry was.

"Gamest ould hare as iver run," said one man enthusiastically to a neighbour, as he panted and pounded across a heavy plough, a good quarter of a mile behind the sterns of the hounds.

"Ay, by me sowl," responded another, "she's the divil iv a long-winded one, and niver a view of her yet, begob."

"An' niver did I run wid a sweeter 'cry' of dogs; musha, God bless the darlints!" cried a third.

The words were scarcely uttered than the little pack came to an abrupt check on the banks of a small osier-fringed brook, and apparently utterly at fault and unable to puzzle out another yard of the line, they allowed the Squire, Denis O'Grady, and those of the field who had managed "to stay" through the burst, to come up with them.

"Two good miles as the crow flies, the divil a foot less. Did iver ye know a hare run so straight in all your life, Denis?" asked McLoughlin, the village cobbler, as he mopped his bald head with the tail of his checked

woollen shirt, which, in the scurry across country, had managed to work itself free from the grip of the leathern belt that he used to keep up his nether garments.

"She must be off her pad" (*i.e.* out of her habitat), explained Denis, with decided confidence.

"Begorra she is, Denis," added Pat Lynch, who came up at that moment, clothed in a coating of black and most unsavoury mud. "An' she'll never be on it again wanst we've done wid her."

Denis lost no time in getting to work again, and making a cast forward he very soon had his hounds on the line once more. His skill as a huntsman was warmly applauded by his admirers.

"Takes old Denis, yet," proudly remarked one of the field to Pat Lynch.

"An' if he couldn't, who could?" retorted Pat. "Didn't his ould father before him break his leg jumping a ditch afther the hounds, an' didn't he sit down that very minute on the ditch and splice it, an' was in at the death?"

"Go along, Pat; you got out of the wrong side of the flax-hole this morning."

"Sure an' it was a wooden leg he had," slyly added Pat, as he sailed away in the wake of the pack as fast as his waterlogged condition would allow.

On and on raced the "currant-jelly dogs" harder than before in a "catch-us-who-can" sort of style, the weedy harriers outpacing and stringing away far ahead of their smaller cousins, the foot-beagles. Not a few of the less game members of the field began to lag per-

ceptibly ; but, possibly spurred on by the idea of a second "christening" at the expense of the Squire, never a one "threw up the sponge."

Old Denis, closely attended by the Squire, was ever in the van, and every now and again the ear-piercing "Forrard, forrard, forrard, me darlints!" of the veteran would be heard above the cry of the hounds. At length the line began to ring somewhat, and some of the followers declared that the hare would shortly double and try back to her "pad" again. The detour taken by the hounds was but small, however, and up hill and down dale they flew, pointing for a small whitewashed farmhouse, which lay nestling amongst the cluster of thatched barns and outhouses about a quarter of a mile ahead. Suddenly the report of a gun rang out, and upon hearing the sound Denis O'Grady cried, "Come on, boys ; that ould divil Tim Cassidy is up to his poaching thricks again, and I'll warrant he has popped the hare."

Helter-skelter ran the crowd of puffing, mud-soiled hare-hunters, yelling vengeance against Cassidy, "the cursed pot-hunter," and as they approached the homestead, there, sure enough, stood the hated farmer on the topmost rungs of a stack ladder, pouring out curses on the heads of the Ballyhilly beagles, which were baying at the foot of his haven of refuge.

"Come down, ye murderin' thief ; come down and bring the hare ye killed this minute wid ye, or I'll shake ye off your perch to feed the dogs," cried Denis, violently shaking the ladder.

Without answering a word, the red-headed, foxy-looking farmer descended from the rick, and then, surrounded by a score of angry, panting men, and with the hounds jumping excitedly all round him, he pulled forth from the pocket of his rusty fustian coat an old charred boot and a tattered red herring attached to a long length of twine.

"That's the only hare I've set eyes on this day, and you're welcome to it, Denis O'Grady; and it's one of your own poaching too, for it's meself saw you laying the thrail wid it this morning," grinningly remarked the farmer, as he handed to the astonished and, we might add, outwitted huntsman the damning drag.

O'Grady was too taken aback to answer a word, and for several moments stood gazing vacantly at the old boot and the remnants of the savoury "soldier," which he still held in his hand.

"And is that the animal you were teaching me all about so carefully this morning, Denis?" ejaculated the Squire, as he pointed to the drag with a look of disgust. "Is that the quarry we've been running the legs off ourselves after for the last two hours? O'Grady, you're a disgrace to your uniform."

"An' so he is, your honour," cried the rest of the hare-hunters in a breath. No sooner were the words uttered than Denis O'Grady was borne down by a score of his late admirers and boon companions, and although the veteran fought tooth and nail to save the green coat, it was torn into a hundred pieces, and a strange figure did

he cut with his bare arms sticking out beyond several inches of coarse Irish lace and linen.

" An' it's the illigant shirt you have on to-day, Denis, wid the beautiful lace where the sleeves ought to be," roared one of the assembled rioters.

" An' it's the illigant lot of blackguards *ye* are to tear the coat off the back of the man that larnt yez how to lay on the best ' cry of dogs ' in the country," replied Denis, not wishing to discuss the subject of his linen.

" Musha, lave off about the coat, Denis, that's past praying for ; but sure it's the foine shirt we're admiring."

" An' if I wasn't a sportsman out and out, d'ye think I'd be afther wearing the ould 'ooman's ? Didn't I pawn me own to back Joe Murphy's ' Betsy ' for the Loughbally Steeplechase ? Och, you're the disthressin' set of villains altogether ! " cried Denis, as he stood shivering and abashed at the unexpected exposure of his underwear.

Denis was made to undergo the further penance of being " chaired " on the shoulders of the hare-hunters to the " Ballyhilly Arms," and great was the joy of the villagers as they flocked into the street to swell the procession on its way to the hostelry, where the " wake " of the green coat was kept up quite as enthusiastically as was the " christening."

E there any ten-pound jack-fish hinter big ode fleet, did ye say, master ? Why, I tell 'ee we mashmen reckons a ten-pound jack-fish a diddy little sprat." " Ah, you reckon a ten-pound pike a diddy little sprat, do you, Thomas ? Well, take your net down to the round pound and get some nice lively bait, and I'll show you how to catch some of your sprats to-morrow."

The above interesting and learned conversation between the bailiff of a certain east-coast marshland island and the writer was held, on one crisp, frosty morning, in the roughly furnished sitting-room of the old-fashioned homestead, that had been set apart from the rest of the rooms for the use of the owner of N—— Island and his shooting friends.

For three whole weeks had I sojourned on that tiny sea-washed island, waging war against the wildfowl for which it is very justly noted, my sole companions the old red-headed bailiff, his wife, and family of nine children

of various ages: and a more uncouth family of marshmen and women it would be hard to find between John o' Groats and Land's End.

A wild, rugged spot for a civilised person to live on for any length of time is N—— Island, situate as it is seven miles away from the nearest village, and that village approachable only at low tide by a road beaconed out along a vast expanse of yellow, treacherous sands and blackgrounds. For many miles the sands stretch away to south, east, and west, and the thunder of the North Sea rollers breaking upon them is heard from the island like the distant firing of heavy artillery.

I have remarked that the inhabitants of N—— are uncouth; but they are more than uncouth, in fact, they are but little better civilised than were their forefathers, the ancient Britons. True, in lieu of woad or skins they clothe themselves in fustian, and may therefore perhaps be allowed to class themselves a notch above their ancient progenitors. Born and bred on the marshes, neither Thomas, his wife, nor one of their interesting and numerous offspring could either read, 'rite or 'rithmetic; indeed, I do not believe that any member of the family—barring Mrs T., who, in early girlhood, once journeyed as far as Norwich—had ever wandered beyond the limits of the village of W——g, to which Thomas paid exactly twelve monthly visits per annum for the double purpose of purchasing provisions and of getting right royally drunk. As for Mrs Thomas, well, I will quote her own words: "Why, me, master, I ain't been furderer nor the road

beacons for over ten year, and I don't want that I should. N—— Island be good enough for the ode man and me and the young 'uns, and as long as we can keep the pot a-biling and get our bit o' baccy " (my charming hostess weighed nearly twenty stone and smoked like a chimney) " what more do us want ? Drat your fal-de-ral towns. I goed hinter Norwich once with me ode fayther when I wor a nipper no bigger nor young Sarey " (*i.e.* Sarah) " there, and worn't I wholly wonderful glad to get back to the mashes again. Them " (pointing to some highly coloured scriptural prints hanging on the kitchen wall) " be some gays I brought back with me, but what they means I never could make out," etc.

As before stated, I had spent three weeks amongst the fowl, which literally swarmed in the fleets and dykes of the island, and such exceptional sport had I enjoyed that I had become almost surfeited with the killing of mallard, widgeon, teal and pochard, single-handed, and was busily engaged packing my kit-bag that I might make an early start for London and civilisation the next day, when suddenly Billy, one of the bailiff's younger sons, burst into my room hugging a beautiful hen-pike of about nine-pound weight.

" Where on earth did you get that fish from ? " I cried, somewhat excitedly, perhaps, for I had not the remotest idea that there were any fish to be caught in the island beyond eels and small Prussian carp, which I knew were to be found in some of the dykes and fleets.

"In the gert ode fleet by the sea-wall. Gie I a shillin' for 'un, master."

"Are there many pike in the fleet, Billy?"

"Ay, if by *pipes* you means jack-fish; there are hundreds o' the varmints. But gie I a shillin' for this 'un, and I'll get 'ee some more to take back to Lunnon with you."

"I will give you a shilling to keep away from the water," I replied, handing the young beggar a brand-new coin, which he immediately "christened" and tied up in a piece of old blanket that acted the double purpose of handkerchief and cravat; then he ran away to send his father to me.

After listening to the old man's yarns of "diddy little sprats," I sent him off with a "silver hook" and a small cast net to catch some bait from a small pond lying near the centre of the marshes, in which I had noticed a number of small Prussian carp, while I set to work to manufacture a rod from a long bamboo, rings from a piece of stout copper wire, and a line from a fifty-hook band (*i.e.* a long line set by east-coast fishermen on the sands for flat-fish, eels, etc.) of fine but strong flax. Fortunately, in the pocket of my kit-bag I found an old fly-book, and, as good luck had it, some snap-tackle in fairly good condition lay between the scaly, yellow parchment leaves of the dear old volume.

Long before my rod-making job was finished, Thomas returned with a bucket of nice-sized Prussian carp.

It was, however, too late to think of trying for the pike

that evening, and, telling the bailiff to keep the bait indoors, as it was freezing hard, I "spatchcocked" a partridge for supper, and turned in on the camp bedstead, beyond the end of which my legs projected about six inches—most uncomfortable when the water is freezing in one's washing-basin—to dream I was sitting down to a dish of ten-pound sprats.

The next morning I was awakened by a loud banging of knuckles on my door, and the musical voice of Thomas shouting, "Lend I yer big gun, master. There be a blazin' lot of ode shellies in the creek."

Years ago a good old uncle of mine used to say to me: "Never lend your gun, razor or wife" (wife was a sort of after-thought, I believe—I have heard my Aunt Jane used to wear the breeches), "and never go anywhere without a bit of string, a knife and a guinea in your pocket, my boy."

I have always endeavoured to act up to the old gentleman's advice as regards the gun, razor, knife and string part of the business. I have never yet possessed such a luxury as a wife, and as to guineas—well, to put it as briefly as possible, "they are not in circulation nowadays." In any case, I did not lend my 4-bore to the bailiff, but, jumping into my clothes, I joined that worthy on the sea-wall, and, looking towards the mouth of the creek, discovered that the "blazin' lot of shellies" consisted of a small paddling of some dozen shelduck resting on the tide at about sixty yards' range from the sea-wall.

"Gie I the gun, master, and I'll show 'ee the way to

knock yonder varmints about," coolly remarked the red-headed little marshman, as he collared hold of the barrels of the gun to take it from me.

"I'll see you hanged first!" was all I allowed myself to utter.

"Well, go for 'un yourself, and miss the 'ole blamed lot," sulkily returned Thomas, as he disappeared into the homestead, slamming the door behind him.

Having made a landmark of a stunted thornbush growing on the embankment at a point almost opposite the fowl, I crept quietly along the base of the wall on the marsh side until I arrived at the bush. Then came the most difficult part of the stalk, for the face of the wall was covered with a sheet of ice, and at the least sound I knew the shielduck would be off.

Inch by inch and foot by foot I worked my way steadily upward, until, after what appeared to me to have been quite an age of crawling, I found my head on a level with the top of the sea-wall.

But where were the shielducks? Flown, vanished like a dream, and yet I could have sworn I was as silent as a cat during the stalk.

The cause of the sudden disappearance of the fowl soon became apparent, however, for lined up like a small regiment of soldiers along that part of the sea-wall facing the homestead I saw the whole of the Thomas family, evidently enjoying to the full the discomfort of "the bloke from Lunnon." And, although the charming group of marshmen were too far away from my standpoint to

enable me to note the expression of their comely faces, I felt convinced that one and all were convulsed with laughter at my expense.

It was useless, however, to cry over spilt milk, and muttering *blessings* towards marshmen generally, and the Thomases in particular, I slid down the sea-wall and returned to my room to breakfast.

The meal finished, I took my improvised rod and tackle, together with a 12-bore gun and cartridges, in case fishing should prove slack, and half emptying the bait bucket of water, handed it to Billy to carry, and we struck a beeline towards the big fleet which lay at the far end of the island.

Upon arriving at the fleet, I found that in several parts the water was covered with a thin sheet of cat-ice ; there were plenty of open holes, however, and having noticed a likely-looking spot about a quarter of a mile from the head of the fleet, I commenced to rig up my tackle as well as I was able without winch, etc.

" How deep is the fleet in the middle, William ? " I inquired of the young marshman who stood grinning by my side, as I operated on a particularly lively and slimy carp.

" There baint no bottom to it, so faither do say."

" Nonsense, my lad, how on earth could these reeds grow if there was no bottom to the fleet ? "

" I tell 'ee faither do say there baint none, and *he* ought to know I reckon."

What an oracle is a father in the eyes of his children,

"WHEW! DON'T HER KICK NEITHER"

To face page 29

even though he be the most ignorant marshman that ever tumbled into a dyke.

Hardly had I dropped my bait into the middle of the fleet when the float—a big cask-bung—commenced bobbing and twisting about in the water as though possessed of a thousand devils.

"There is no pike about that gentleman," I ejaculated, as I took up the rod to strike. Swish! and I was into him; but, as I struck, the silver belly and snake-like head of an enormous eel appeared for a moment of time on the surface.

"Whoy, yew've got a gert ode eel, nigh big as the conger w'at comed ashore on the sands last spring tides, master. Whew! don't her kick neither."

"Her" did kick, like an unbroken mule, for quite ten minutes and then she caved in; and the biggest fresh-water eel it had ever been my luck to catch lay on the bank of the fleet; and in less time than it takes to write the great slimy brute had so twisted and knotted up my line that it took me quite half-an-hour to unravel the tangle. Six pounds did that silver-bellied monster weigh, and, as I remarked before, it was the heaviest of its species I had ever caught or am likely to catch again.

Having cleared my tackle, I chose the biggest and liveliest bait I could find in the bucket, and, moving a little farther along the bank, I again made a cast into the middle of the fleet.

Scarcely had the bait disappeared into the depths of the black, peaty-looking water, than my young com-

panion (I had sent him up to the homestead to get my tobacco pouch) came up to me at the double with the news that, " vour ode mallard " had dropped into the round pool.

Telling William to watch the rod, but upon no pretence whatever to handle it, I took my gun, and putting in a couple of No. 3's, walked along to the head of the fleet, clambered over the sea-wall, and began the stalk along the saltings, which ran from the creek right up to the base of the sea-wall.

Suddenly a curlew rose from a muddy gut within thirty yards of me, and uttering shrieks of alarm, loud enough to give warning of my presence to all the fowl in the neighbourhood, he went over to the next island.

How my trigger-finger itched to send a dose of shot after that screeching bird, but I refrained from pulling at him, fearful of disturbing the duck.

Having walked about half-a-mile across the salts, I came to a slight break in the wall, at which point William informed me I should be well within shot of the pond.

Cautiously pushing my gun before me, I climbed up the face of the embankment on all fours, and, taking off my cap, peered through the long rank grass growing on the crown, when to my joy I discovered the mallard bunched together in the middle of the pond, at about forty yards' range.

" One barrel should account for the lot," I inwardly ejaculated, and quietly, inch by inch, I pushed my gun

over the top of the wall, and still keeping my head well covered behind the long grass, I took aim and pulled. Click! "Hang it—a miss-fire!" Up went the head of a fine drake, whose quick ear heard that ominous click, and, uttering a warning quack to his fellows, he sprang like a teal from the water—too late, however, for the next moment he crumpled up like an old glove to the contents of my second barrel, and a young mallard in immature plumage also dropped with a wing down to the same charge. The remaining couple flew seawards with a great to-do, and were soon lost to view behind the headland of the island.

Hurrying down to the pond, I found the old drake lying paddles upward where he had dropped, but not a sign could I see of the winged bird. Suddenly, however, my attention was attracted by a circle of air-bubbles rising amongst a growth of water-plants within a few yards of where I was standing, and upon closer examination I discovered a small object, which I at once recognised as being the bill of a duck, poking up amongst the weeds. Putting a cartridge in my gun, I walked a little way back from the bank of the pond, and aiming a little below the object, I fired, and up bobbed the mallard, stone dead.

Still, the duck had to be gathered, and after hunting round for a few minutes, I came across a broken sheep-hurdle, and wrenching away the top bar, fastened the end of a piece of string (moral, never be without a bit of string, etc.) to the middle of the bar, threw the

apparatus out just beyond the birds, and so dragged each out in turn.

An unearthly kind of yell suddenly reached my ears, and looking in the direction of the fleet, I saw Billy waving his cap like a madman with one hand, and hauling away at my rod with the other.

Taking ditch and dyke in my stride—and some of them were yawners—I ran across the marshes as though his Satanic Majesty was at my heels.

"Thought I told you not to touch the rod, William?" I remarked to the boy, who appeared half-scared out of his wits.

"I know 'e did, mister, but that gert old jack-fish would have pulled the rod into the fleet if I hadn't a taken howd of it," and then, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, he added, "Lord, I be afeared o' the masterful ode varmint, for he comed at me open-jawed like a mad dawg!"

That there was a heavy fish at the end of my line I was convinced, and during one or two mad rushes he made across the fleet I was fearful that my not over-powerful bamboo rod would go smash; but after playing the fish very quietly and carefully for some twenty minutes or so, I hauled it into the shallow shelving bank of the fleet, one of the handsomest specimens of a pike I had ever seen. The fish scaled a few ounces over 17 lb.

Between the hours of eight A.M. and one P.M. I landed nine jack from the big fleet, all of which, however, with

the exception of the seventeen-pounder, proved "marshmen's sprats," for the biggest of them only scaled $7\frac{3}{4}$ lb.

The last fish run would, I believe, have proved a second "mad dawg" had he been landed, but the poor old bamboo went "bust" at a very early stage of the encounter, and the big fish went off, carrying with him more lead, steel, gimp, and flax than he would be able to digest in a month of Sundays.

That same afternoon I left N—— Island and its inhabitants in the only conveyance obtainable—viz. an old tumbril-cart drawn by an ancient Suffolk Punch; and three hours later, well laden with fish and fowl, I found myself standing on Liverpool Street Railway Station.

A VERY TAME STAG HUNT

NTIL I took up my abode at World End (the "one hoss" village appears on the parish map under quite a different name) my experience of staghunting had been confined to the chase of the wild red deer of Exmoor, and I am bound to confess that the grand sport shown by the bell-voiced, dappled beauties of the Devon and Somerset packs is second only to the premier of all British field-sports, foxhunting. My initiation into the mysteries of tame "stagging" was with a certain so-called farmer's pack, the kennels of which stand well within fifty miles of London; my mount "Shanks' mare," and my companion, a jovial member of the Stock Exchange, who six days in the week vegetates in this quiet country village, and with Micawber-like patience and fortitude waits for something to turn up, in the shape of a "boom" in "Kaffirs."

"We'll see the stag uncarted and hounds 'laid on' and then lunch at the George," said I to Barker, as we

trudged along the three miles of muddy highway, which lay between World End and the appointed fixture at Marland.

" Why not run with them a bit, if only to get down a little superfluous weight ? " asked Barker, who, I may remark, is not of " Pharaoh's lean kine."

" My dear fellow, if you had but seen the manner in which stag-hounds race away the moment they are laid on the line of their quarry, you would not suggest anything so quixotic as running to them on foot," replied I, with all the assurance of an old staghunter. Little did I think that my companion would have the laugh of me ere the morning was out.

Immediately upon arriving at the meet, Barker coaxed me into entering the hospitable portals of the George Hotel. A good-looking and level little pack of hounds, under the charge of their huntsman and a couple of whips, was ranged in the wide sleepy old High Street, before the hotel, with quite a crowd of bucolic judges of horse and hound flesh discussing the points of both the pack and of the hunt servants' mounts. The George meanwhile was doing a roaring trade amongst the members of the hunt, for not only were the men laying in a fairly good store of " jumping powder " but a bevy of fair Dianas also appeared to be refreshing themselves in a particularly generous fashion. Of course Barker and myself, as humble pedestrians, were looked upon somewhat askance by the assembled company as we seated ourselves in an alcove of the long wainscoted

room and quaffed bitter beer from deep old-fashioned tankards. Our skins resembling the hide of the rhinoceros as regards impenetrability, however, neither Barker nor myself were in the smallest degree disconcerted by the haughty glances showered upon us by the cavaliers. On the contrary we enjoyed our tankards of ale amazingly and improved our knowledge of the *genus homo* by studying the habits and physiognomy of the assembled sportsmen and sportswomen. Amongst the former were to be seen not a few professional *habitues* of the London horse marts, all well, albeit gaudily, groomed. But one gentleman, whom I afterwards discovered to be the local auctioneer, had a strange fascination for both Barker and myself. From soft-legged "tops" to glossy "Lincoln & Bennett," Mr L— was immaculately "turned out." His leathers and black Melton frock spoke of the master hand—or rather shears—of a certain noted sartorial artist whose "studio" lies not a hundred miles distant from Marble Arch; his well-starched, snow-white stock was tied to a nicety, and, as our contemporary *The Coat and Breeches Maker* would probably have it, "the neck-wear was set off to perfection by a delicately-tinted buff waistcoat." A pair of white buckskin gloves, a natty buttonhole of violets, long-necked spurs, and a well-thonged workmanlike crop completed—to speak professionally—the inventory of this worthy sportsman's outward and visible signs of sportsmanship. Of florid complexion and goodly girth, Mr L— stood some 5 ft. 6 in. in his boots

and walked not less than fourteen stone. It was not so much the opulent presence or sartorial garniture of this gallant staghunter that impressed my companion and myself, however, as the great talent he displayed in the gentle art of playing his own little trumpet and the deft and clever manner in which he recovered himself after stumbling heavily at such difficult obstacles as aspirates. "My stud consists of seven 'unt—h'm! *hun*ters; all fine hup—h'm! *up*standing 'ors—h'm! *hor*ses and good weight carriers to boot," we heard him tell a very bored-looking lady in a brown habit, who replied somewhat irrelevantly, that she "wished to heaven that they would uncart the stupid old stag," and then gazed listlessly at the hounds waiting patiently outside.

Of the local "Tattersall's" prowess in the hunting field we heard not a little—from his own lips—and later in the day it was our privilege to witness his skill and courage as a horseman.

But we must leave this gay and festive scene, for a foxy-faced, swivel-eyed little man in velvet cap and green livery, the driver of the deer cart, pokes his head through the coffee-room doorway and bawls: "If any lady or gen'leman wants to see the stag turned down they'd best hurry up as the maister jest give orders for the cart to be drove up Bell Hill."

Upon hearing this important announcement, about a dozen of the followers of the hunt, including the bored lady in the brown habit, went out into the great courtyard and were soon in the saddle, while Barker and

myself, having ascertained the way to Bell Hill, trudged on a little in advance of the cavalcade, and arrived at the hill a good ten minutes before the deer cart.

There were perhaps a score of foot-people—mostly truant schoolboys—besides ourselves, waiting to see the deer turned down; and a very imposing procession made that newly painted green stag cart with the M.S.H. riding a little in advance, and a "baker's dozen" or so horsemen and horsewomen bringing up the rear of the vehicle. Indeed, viewed from a distance, it would have been easy to imagine that some royal personage was travelling in semi-state along that winding, country highway. At length the procession surmounts the steep hill, the van is backed through a muddy gateway, the double doors of the same are thrown open, and out springs a heavy-looking stag, who, having bestowed a benign and friendly glance upon his would-be pursuers, begins to nibble at the tender young shoots of a thorn-bush within a yard of the Master, towards whom he appears to entertain a great affection; for, notwithstanding that that gentleman flicks him repeatedly with the thong of his whip, the friendly creature refuses to budge. This exhibition of good feeling between the Master and the stag seems to appeal to the little crowd of errant Board School children, one of whom, a rosy-cheeked curly-headed youngster, remarks vociferously to a rufus-haired chum, who has just appeared on the scene, "Lor', Ginger, come and have a squint at this yer' ode deer. He do look just loike 'Oyster

Jack's ' donkey, and he be wonderful sight more tame loike."

The M.S.H. at length began to evince signs of impatience and embarrassment at the affectionate behaviour of his quarry, and cracked his thong for all he was worth. The rest of the assembled " staggers " also joined in the thong-cracking exercise, until one might have imagined that a pistol duel on a large scale was taking place. Apparently annoyed somewhat at the clatter, the deer trotted leisurely to the outskirts of a small covert, lying about 100 yards from the spot where he was uncarted, and began to feast upon succulent young swedes.

The swivel-eyed man was now sent speeding to bring up the hounds which were still airing their sterns before the George Hotel a good mile away.

Having despatched the messenger, the Master, with the little crowd of youthful rustics following close on the heels of his mare, trotted over to the edge of the wood, where the stag was still nibbling peacefully, and again a volley of pistol-like reports awoke the slumbering echoes of the wood. But the stag was evidently inured to such petty annoyances, and it was not until the inventive genius of a ten-year-old lad asserted itself that the noble quarry left its banquet of roots and with a graceful bound disappeared into the dense under covert of the wood. Hearken, ye tame staghunters, and learn how the trick was done. The knowledge may prove of service to you at some future time.

Observing a superannuated biscuit tin lying half

hidden amongst a tangle of bents and brambles, an intelligent-looking youngster retrieved the same and having dropped a number of pebbles therein he approached to within a yard of the stag and then commenced to rattle out the most diabolical discord it is possible to imagine. The animal bore the row stoically for a few moments and then, with a look of mild but pained surprise at his tormentor, he sought the quiet harbourage of the nighbouring wood.

But look yonder at the velvet caps and splashes of scarlet bobbing up and down above the hedgerow bordering the road! Hounds are coming and half-a-hundred followers behind them; our friend the auctioneer conspicuous on a bright chestnut weight-carrier of the right stamp.

No sooner have the dappled beauties entered the gateway than they pick up the scent, stream across the field of roots, come to a momentary check over the stag's recent banqueting place, and then away again and into the covert with a crash of music that fills the dells and valleys of the wood, and re-echoes among the hills. The Master and hunt servants follow close in the wake of the pack, while about a third of the field—the lady in the brown habit leading the van—get a good start. On the other hand, however, the majority of the followers stick religiously to the main road which runs parallel with the covert for some little distance, then takes a sharp turn to the right and passes the far end of the wood. Among the keenest of the highway brigade was Mr L—, who took

the two-feet grips that drained the grassy waste flanking either side of the road in gallant style. When the cry of the hounds had died away and the last of the road potterers disappeared from view, I, imagining that we had seen the last of the hunt for that day at least, suggested to Barker that luncheon was a most excellent institution; and with appetites sharpened by the keen country air we set off on a bee-line across plough and meadow towards the George Hotel. Very soon our way was barred by a particularly thorny, quickset fence bordering a narrow bridle-path. I was in the act of hauling my companion through a gap in the hedge when the pattering sound of "slots" caused me to turn my head, and then, to my surprise, I saw the stag quietly trotting down the lane towards us. Upon sighting me, he stopped dead and immediately began to browse upon the short grass growing at the side of the pathway. Nor did the "holloa" of Barker and myself alarm the stag, or bring the hounds up to him. For some ten minutes or more we holloaed until we were hoarse. At length the sound of many hoofs, galloping up the bridle-path in exactly the contrary direction to that in which the stag had travelled, heralded the advent of the high-way brigade led by the sporting auctioneer, who came pounding along the rutty lane "hell for leather" shaking his bridle-rein as though riding a closely contested five-furlong scurry.

"Why the dooce don't you fellers lay into him with your sticks and make him run instead of holloaing like

a couple of escaped lunatics ?" angrily cried the knight of the hammer to Barker and myself, as he made a vigorous but unsuccessful cut at the stag with his heavy thong, very nearly unseating himself in the effort.

Resenting somewhat the imperious manner of Mr L—, my companion replied that as lovers of tame and domestic animals we did not deem ourselves called upon to disturb the noble beast at its mid-day meal. Then, in the most courteous tone of voice, Barker asked how he (L—) and those of the field who accompanied him managed to head the deer instead of riding to hounds in the orthodox manner.

What the worthy auctioneer would have replied will never be known, for no sooner did he open his lips than with a buck the stag cleared the fence, and a hoarse, stomachic View holloa! from Mr L— took the place of what would probably have proved a scathing flow of satire and vituperation. The stag meanwhile calmly trotted some 200 yards along the fence and then re-commenced his much-interrupted meal.

The cry of the hounds was now heard, at first very faintly, but the music increased in volume every moment until the slowly hunting pack, followed by the Master and huntsmen, came into view.

Putting spurs to his horse, Mr L—, heedless of foiling the line, galloped up to the huntsmen, shouting at the top of his voice: "For God's sake stop 'em, or they'll run into the stag."

By the combined efforts of the M.S.H. and his lieu-

tenants, who spared neither voice, horn nor whip, the pack was got off the line and taken into a neighbouring meadow, while one of the whips was "told off" to chivy the quarry into running. Then came the most humorous part in the sporting comedy. Now, as to whether or no the servant's mount had at some time been turned out to grass in the deer paddock, and so struck up an acquaintance with the stag, we cannot say. Be this as it may, the manner in which that gentlest of all the *cervus* family "cottoned" on to the gelding was quite pathetic. In vain did the whipper-in endeavour to make him run again. He would have none of it, but trotted leisurely alongside his equine friend, until the man, probably realising the absurdity of the scene, secured him.

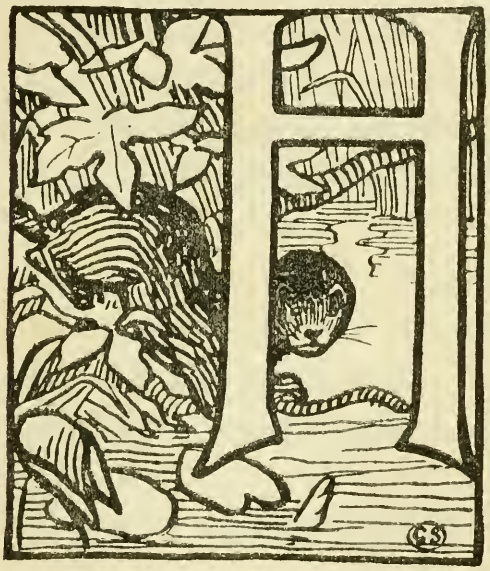
The Master, seeing that there was no run to be got out of the stag, gave orders for it to be encarted and another stag turned down, but we did not wait the arrival of the cart, having had enough tame "stagging" for one day.

"Upon what grounds the anti-sporting league call tame staghunting a cruel sport I cannot imagine," quoth Barker as we returned homewards through leafless lanes and flooded meadows.

FAIR PLAY FOR THE OTTER ON COARSE FISH STREAMS

"HUNTSMAN.—Come, gentlemen, come all, let's go to the place where we *put down* the *otter*; look you, hereabout it was that shee kennell'd; look you, here it was indeed, for here's her young ones, no less than five; come, let's kill them all.

"PISCATOR.—No, I pray, sir; save me one, and I'll try if I can make her tame, as I know an ingenious gentleman in Leicestershire has done; who hath not only made her tame, but to catch fish and doe many things of much pleasure."—*The Compleat Angler.*



NOW it grieves the heart of a sportsman to read every now and again in the provincial papers an intimation as follows:—"A very fine bitch otter was on Tuesday last shot by one of Mr Nouveau Riche's keepers. The otter proved upon examination to be sucking young, and after a long hunt, with keen-scented dogs, five well-grown cubs were discovered and despatched."

Now, if such persons as Mr Nouveau Riche had but seen the grand sport an otter can show before hounds, and could be induced to understand that the amount of damage in the way of decreasing the number of fish in coarse fish streams by otter is practically *nil*, surely they

would instruct those whose duty it is to protect their sporting interests to desist from slaughtering one of the most interesting species of our British *fauna*.

In such a river as the Thames,[1] where it would be almost impossible to hunt an otter, and where the preservation of coarse fish is a great boon to the toiling multitude of London, one can argue little, perhaps, against the trapping of otters; but even then are not scores—nay, hundreds—of individuals amongst that same multitude of citizens devoted to natural history, who, granted the opportunity, would give a dozen moonlight nights away from their beds to watch the movements of one of these interesting creatures as he flashed past the watcher either on the bank or in the water? And then, again, out of the teeming millions of coarse fish that will be found in such rivers as the Thames, can it for a moment be believed that the damage wrought by one or even half-a-dozen otters in, say, twenty miles of water, would make any appreciable difference at all to the sport of the angler? To my mind the suggestion is ridiculous.

What is thought of a man who, on such a stream as I have mentioned, kills a kingfisher? And, indeed, is not that gaily plumaged frequenter of our rivers and streams very properly protected by law? Yet, let one of our field naturalists who has watched these birds fishing tell us which of the two—an otter or a kingfisher—does most

[1] Since this article was written the Thames Conservancy has passed a bye-law protecting the otter on the river Thames.

damage to a stream. I believe the naturalist's verdict would be, the kingfisher.

Last year two pairs of kingfishers made their nests in the banks of a small river that runs close to my house, and I took great delight in watching for hours the birds bringing food to their young. Unfortunately, some wretched boy discovered one of the nests, and he reached the young birds by digging away the light loamy soil of the bank, and scooped out a great portion of the nest itself, which was entirely composed of the bones and scales of small fish (it has a most evil odour). There must have been hundreds of these small fish to make so large a mass, and it was a mystery to me what became of the flesh, for the birds did not occupy many days in building their nest; and it would have been physically impossible during the time they were so engaged to devour the fish themselves. Possibly the fish were allowed to rot in the nest; hence the frightful stench thereof.

Let not the reader for one moment suppose that I am playing off the kingfisher against the otter, for I should feel inclined to deal with the man who shot one of those beautiful birds on my stream as he dealt with the bird; but I do not think it just or reasonable, where both creatures have a great attraction for a lover of Nature, to wage inveterate war against the lesser, whilst a wise Government punishes the man who shoots the greater fish-poacher.

One is, of course, bound to admit that upon trout

fisheries—where every fish is prized—both the otter and kingfisher must be intolerable nuisances; and, if there be not a pack of otterhounds in the neighbourhood, one would not think unkindly of the man who killed otters on a trout stream. But it is not to owners of trout fishing that we plead the cause of poor *Lutra vulgaris*.

Masters of otterhounds find it difficult to kill their quarry in our midland, eastern or other sluggish streams, and therefore but few packs of hounds are kept where such streams prevail; but during the last few years several packs have been established to hunt these waters —the Bucks and Essex otterhounds, amongst others, having shown exceptional sport in the deep, sluggish rivers of their respective counties. Bloodless hunts are, of course, not an exception, for the otter escapes more often with his life in the deep than in the shallower streams. The worst trouble the huntsman has to encounter in a deep, slow stream is the dense aquatic growth, through which it is difficult, and indeed dangerous, for hounds to swim or dive.

Many an enjoyable day has the writer had with that good sportsman, the late Hon. Geoffrey Hill, and his splendid Hawkstone hounds, on the Buckinghamshire Ouse and the Oxfordshire Cherwell, both of which streams are in many places very deep.

Possibly some of my readers will remember a magnificent drag the Hawkstone pack showed on the Cherwell during a visit of those hounds to the water in question

some years ago, which, to the best of my ability and as well as my memory serves me, I will re-run.

The meet was appointed at Gosford Bridge for eight A.M., and at that hour a huge gathering of all sorts and conditions of men were anxiously awaiting the advent of the M.O.H. and hounds, the latter being kennelled near by.

When the hounds were "thrown off" they "spoke" immediately, and, with much scrambling and hustling, away we went, men, women, and children, all as keen as mustard. Soon an overshoot was reached, and one of the tiny broken-haired terriers (a Scotsman, if I remember rightly) which ran with the pack was washed into the basin below. Some few minutes elapsed before the terrier was rescued from the boiling torrent, and it was not until some time had been spent in rubbing, chafing, and administering a stimulant to him that he recovered from his unpleasant bath; and not until then would the humane Master allow the hounds (which had been whipped off) to be laid on again.

Then, with a crash of music such as otterhounds alone know how to play, the shaggy beauties went streaming along once more, the field often a long meadow behind their waving sterns; but, thanks to the checks that so often occur in this sport, through the otter having taken to the water for a distance, or by some other manœuvre on his part, those of the field who could *stay* managed to see most of the work done.

For thirteen miles, "as the crow flies," the field

AN OTTER HUNT

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were footing it as hard as they could go, and the glorious music of the hounds was almost incessant. At last the quarry was marked to a "holt," in the form of a drain running from a gentleman's residence down to the river bank. I happened to be on the wrong side of the river, but both banks were crowded with the followers of the hunt; for, notwithstanding the fact that the pace and going had reduced the ranks somewhat, I believe there could not have been less than a thousand ladies, undergraduates and general onlookers, who had followed even to that distance from Oxford.

The terriers were put into the head of the drain near the house, which was situate quite 100 yards from the river. Soon the yapping of the little dogs proclaimed the fact that they had found the otter, and shortly after he appeared at the mouth of the "holt" and promptly dived into the stream. The terriers followed close on his heels, and the appearance of the first led one to think that his muzzle had been bitten off; but this afterwards proved not to be the case, although the terrier was severely mauled about the head.

For an hour and twenty minutes after the otter had been bolted ensued a hunt in deep water, and hounds killed their game in the river, close to the bank, at a spot where a spinney ran down to the water's edge.

The otter was taken into an adjoining meadow and thrown to the hounds, who "worried" him again and again; but, "worry" him as they would, they could not break his pelt.

The Master, who was standing on the far-side bank to the hounds, winded his horn to try and draw the attention of his whipper-in, but so great was the uproar that neither voice nor horn could be heard. At length the whip waded through the breast-high water with the otter round his neck and the hounds swimming all round him, and a more beautiful scene I have seldom witnessed.

The pelt of that game otter was cut up into very small pieces, and the man to whom was presented a piece went on his way rejoicing.

From this brief sketch it will, I hope, be seen that good sport may be shown and otters killed by hounds even in deep, sluggish rivers; and no one knows this fact better than the Master of the Bucks otterhounds, who to-day hunts the waters I have written of herein, and who shows many a rattling good day's sport to his followers.

Can it be shown that an equal amount of sport, to a twentieth part of the number of persons who will be found at a big meet of otterhounds, would be obtained from the fish—chiefly eels, bream, chub and the like—this game animal consumed during the whole of his existence? I think not.

A NIGHT IN A TUB

AIR goot, mein friend, zen I shall zee you at mine little place on ze lake shore at five o'clock dis evening," said Max Burg, a magnificent specimen of the Teutonic race, who stood six feet three in his stockings, and who, like many of his countrymen, was a keen sportsman and a rattling good shot to boot.

It was late autumn—November, if I remember rightly—and I had arranged to spend a night, or rather an early morning's duck-shooting on one of the many lagoons formed by the sand-bars and shallows of Lake Ontario. A couple of hours' drive from the city of Toronto took me to Max Burg's rose-wreathed, rough-cast bungalow, which stood in the midst of a plantation of beautiful spruce pine-trees, and at no great distance from the lake shore.

My genial host, arrayed in his fowling-kit of stout grey flannel, cap, and high leather tuck-boots, having lent a hand in racking down my trotting mare, led me

into his snug trophy-hung dining-room, and after taking a "cocktail" we sat down to an appetising little dinner, which Max informed me had been prepared and cooked entirely by himself.

"I do all ze work mineself ven I am here, for zere are no womens admitted, not even mine vife," declared my host as he uncorked an excellent bottle of "Dry Monopole." "Ze moon is yust right to-night," went on he. "She vill be up at eleven, and we shall take the boats very soon after midnight and row to the lagoons. I hafe ze decoys and ze tubs on board, and I hope zat you hafe much shells with you? You will need it."

Having smoked one of my host's cigars, I begged to be allowed to snatch a few hours' sleep before setting out on the fowling expedition, as I had spent a great part of the preceding night at the bedside of a sick friend of mine.

I did not appear to have slept ten minutes, when I heard the stentorian voice of the German bidding me "turn out," as it was time to start away for the lagoons. After partaking of a slice of Brandenham ham and a steaming cup of coffee, we took our 10-bore guns and a goodly supply of cartridges, and walked down to a roughly constructed jetty, to which were moored a couple of tubby, flat-bottomed boats containing a number of wooden decoys fashioned and painted to represent different kinds of duck, while a deep tub filled with straw lay in the stern of either craft.

It was a glorious night, and the beams of the full

moon illuminated the surface of the lake until it appeared a vast expanse of rippling, molten silver, and the air, although keen, was dry and invigorating. Following close in the wake of my companion's boat, I started upon what was to me an unknown voyage, as I had never before visited the lagoons. Max did not venture very far away from *terra firma*, however, and the dim outline of the low-lying shore was always to be seen from the boats. On and on pulled the stalwart German at a pace which proclaimed him to be no mean oarsman. Indeed, it would have been strange had he not proved himself a good sculler, seeing that he was a favourite pupil of Edward Hanlan, ex-champion sculler of the world, whose island-hotel was situate in Toronto Bay.

Suddenly I found my boat in the midst of a carpet-like growth of water plantains, through which it was impossible to use the oars. I, therefore, took a long iron-shod pole and commenced to punt through the dense aquatic growth. It was hard work, and my not over-brawny arms ached painfully long before the fowling grounds were reached. At length, however, just as I began to wonder when my "term of hard labour" would expire, my companion's boat disappeared into a belt of high reeds, and putting on a "spurt" I followed, to find myself in an oval sedge-fringed pan of moonlit water.

The Teuton now proceeded to find the driest foothold he was able among the reeds, and then, having sunk my tub to within a couple of feet of the surface of the

oozy mud, and placed the decoys well within shot of the "blind," he left me to seek a "lay-up" for himself, his last words being, "Keep varm, mein friend, until I call for you in ze morning, and may ze ducks fly you're vay in t'ousands."

"*Auf Wiedersehen! Glück zu,*" was my answering hail as Burg passed into the night.

Were I to say that the next few hours proved enjoyable to me in the somewhat limited accommodation afforded by my tub, I should scarcely tell the truth. It was long past midnight ere I took possession of my temporary lodging amidst the reeds, the thermometer registered several degrees of frost, my position was decidedly cramped, and, worse than all, I had either lost or left behind my flask of old rye whisky. True, I had my pipe and a thundering big plug of negrohead in the pocket of my shooting jacket, but when the thought of taking a "whiff" passed through my brain, the German's "Whatever else you may do, don't smoke or light a match" rang clear as an electric bell in my tingling ears.

Notwithstanding the cold and discomfort, however, I must have dropped into a doze, for I remember perfectly well to this day that in my dreams I was wandering in a state of nature among the orange groves of Florida, when the harsh call of an old coot awakened me to the stern reality of my tub-bed. As stiff as an ancient horse, I looked around my "blind" to discover that the first grey signs of dawn were beginning to appear on the eastern skyline, and that a number of dim forms were

WAITING FOR THE TEAL

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dodging in and out amongst my decoys. In the uncertain light of early morning I could not tell what kind of fowl had dropped to the decoys. On that point I was not long left in doubt, however, for, as I rammed a couple of cartridges home with numbed and aching fingers, a shrill whistle came to my ears, and then I knew that my visitors were green-wing teal.

Aiming at some six or seven of the little duck which were well " bunched " for a successful shot, I pulled, but to my surprise every bird sprang from the water, apparently untouched ; nor was I a whit more successful with my second barrel. To say that I was disgusted at the bloodless result of my first " double " would be but putting it very lightly. The veriest tyro would not easily have " muffed " the teal as they placidly sat on the water within twenty-five yards of my tub. I was using my favourite and well-tried 10-bore " Churchill," while my cartridges, although not of English loading, I had purchased from a Toronto gunmaker of repute. I was, therefore, unable to attribute the *fiasco* to any other cause than that of " crooked powder." There was but little time to ponder over the matter, however, for the whistling of wings all round my " blind " heralded the advent of the morning flight. A bunch of some twenty pochards next paid a visit to the decoys, and after circling the lagoon they drooped amongst the dummies. Again I pulled at a couple of the red-heads, which were paddling almost wing to wing, but although I distinctly heard the shot-pellets strike against their plumage, both

went away as though they rather liked it, while a third pochard, which I took as he rose, also got away with the loss of only one breast feather.

It now became evident to me that not "crooked" but damp powder was answerable for the escape of the fowl, and, muttering blessings (?) on the head of the man who sold me the damaged shells, I again loaded up and waited for another chance of experimenting. The report of the German's gun reached me every now and again from some other lagoon lying at no great distance away. During the next ten minutes or so nothing in the shape of fowl visited my pan beyond a couple of coots, which paddled in and out amongst the decoys as though to satisfy themselves regarding the species of the queer-looking birds which had taken possession of the "bald pates" sanctuary. Suddenly one of the coots made a savage dig at a highly coloured wooden teal, and then with a loud "Cluck, cluck!" of derision he flew into a clump of dense wild rice plants, with his dusky consort following close in his wake. A string of mallard, flying far out of gunshot, passed over my head, but on they sped, taking not the slightest notice of the decoys. Then in twos and threes and in bunches came duck, teal and pochard, some well within and others well out of range, while I blazed away until the barrels of my gun were hot; but I only succeeded in stopping a miserable specimen of a gargany, which, upon *post-mortem* examination, proved to have been killed with a single pellet of No. 6, which, entering the eye, had penetrated

the brain. Muttering curses on Canadian cartridges in general, and upon the brand I was using in particular, I threw down my gun in despair, got my pipe under way, and settled myself amongst the straw in the tub to await the coming of my fellow-fowler.

Never shall I forget the disgust I felt while watching the bunches of duck passing all round, while I sat helpless in my infernal mash-tub. Hanging was too good for the scoundrel who palmed off those worthless shells upon me, an unsuspecting, innocent Britisher.

At length the great fiery head of the sun appeared above the blue horizon. The flight was practically over, and my contribution to the bag was but a solitary gargany. Gad, how Max Burg would chaff me !

As I sat cramped up in my Diogenesian retreat, smoking and soliloquising upon the dishonesty of the gunpowder world, the tall bamboo-like growth of reeds fringing the pan suddenly parted, and the ugly bluff nose of the German's boat poked its way through the opening.

" Vell, mein friend, you have had colossal sport ; how many of ze ducks haf you killed ? " roared the bearded giant, as he poled his heavy craft up to my " blind " as though it were but a mere cork.

" One," was my laconic reply, as I held up the gargany for the edification of my companion, whose boat, by the way, was half filled with many different kinds of duck.

" Ach ! you do joke, because I haf heard you shoot

hundred times," laughed Max, as he looked first into the tub and then all round my " blind " for the missing fowl.

I declared that had my shells been good the tub would not have been sufficiently large to have held the duck I should have slain. The German smiled somewhat cynically, reminding me the while that a bad workman has a little knack of grumbling at his tools. A few hours later, however, I proved my statement regarding the worthlessness of the cartridges to be true, for upon trying them at a wooden roof-shingle, at twenty-five yards, the shot-pellets scarcely pitted the same ; whereas one of the German's shells when fired from my old 10-bore at forty paces smashed the shingle into splinters.

" I tink in dat case it vas de tools and not the vorkman who vas to blame," said Burg, as he examined the contents of one of the faulty shells. " But, mein Gott, who can tell ? " slyly added he, with a grin, " dere is always a man behind ze gun dat shoots crooked."

A RECORD OTTER HUNT

OOK! If that's not the 'seal' of an otter, I'm a Dutchman!" exclaimed my friend M. to me one morning as we were jogging along the bank of the Klip River on our Basuto ponies after an impromptu game of polo on the ground which to-day forms the playing-field of the Rand Polo Club.

In a moment I was out of the saddle and examining the patch of grey mud which my companion had pointed out to me. Yes; there could be no doubt about it, the pad-prints were those of Master *Lutra*, and upon searching the banks of the stream a little lower down we discovered the half-eaten remains of a yellow fish which had probably afforded him a breakfast that very morning, for the fish had not been out of the water many hours.

"Tell you what, D.," went on M., as he puffed out a great cloud of rank Boer tobacco smoke until the pure morning air simply reeked of "burned rags," "we'll get

together a bobbery pack, and have an otter hunt; I'm simply wasting to see a little hound-work of some sort."

I agreed that the suggestion was excellent, but wondered the while where the material for the pack was to come from.

"Oh, don't worry your noble head on that score," remarked M., as we cantered across a wide stretch of veldt which lay between the river and our bungalow. "We'll go into town this evening, and if we can't borrow dogs, we'll steal 'em" (he spoke quite seriously), "and if we can't get together a pack by borrowing and stealing, hanged if we won't buy up the Dogs' Home. I saw the catchers net some devilish varmint-looking curs in Commissioner Street yesterday, and you may bet that old pony of yours against a tickey" (3*d.*) "you won't stand to lose much, for he's twenty years if he's a day—that there will be no lack of dogs awaiting their turn in the lethal chamber, poor devils," rattled on my mercurial companion, as he cast a covetous leer at my pony, Bushman, who, although somewhat aged, was as good and clever a little animal as ever looked through a bridle.

"I should hate to offer you old Bushman for thirty of the best anyway, M., for I know you'd jump at the offer, and I should lose the best pony I ever threw leg across."

That same evening M. and myself rode into the golden city, and having dined at the club, my friend proceeded to try and borrow a dog from every man with whom he had a "nodding acquaintance."

"Well, I've got a pointer," or "You may have my

setters," were the kind of replies made to M.'s cool request. But in most cases the owners of the dogs would, after consenting to lend their setter, pointer, or retriever, as the case might be, ask, "What do you want the dog for—korhaan?" "No, otters." "Otters be d——d, you can't have him for that kind of game," and away would go the dog's owner in a huff. We—or rather M.—managed to "bag" two and a half couple from different members of the club—namely, a bull-terrier (blind of an eye), one Irish and two fox terriers, an ancient spaniel (he went on three legs by choice), and a powerful skew-bald animal, of doubtful breed, which was promptly christened "Window-shutter."

After leaving the club we visited the stables of the principal horsedealer in the place, who promised to bring as many dogs as he could commandeer to the "meet," which, by the way, was to take place at a certain small hostelry on the bank of the Klip River, the hour of five o'clock being fixed, for, as many of our readers are aware, the South African veldt holds practically no scent after the heavy night dews have been dissipated by the hot rays of the sun.

Bidding the worthy merchant in horse-flesh "good-evening," we walked down Commissioner Street until the Dogs' Home was reached. It was now nearly nine o'clock, and the Dutchman in charge of the home did not appear over-pleased at being disturbed by a couple of *verdammte rooineks*. A golden disc, bearing the effigy of Oom Paul, gave us the *entree* to the kennels, however,

and ten minutes later we were being towed up the principal streets of Johannesburg in the wake of a spotted weasel-like Kaffir dog and a powerful half-bred Airedale terrier, which subsequently proved herself to be the best of the whole pack.

"We'll call this a day's work, D., for I'm about tired of dog-catching for one evening," said my companion, as we discussed a "long-schooner" of iced lager beer before we set out on our ponies homewards. The idea of calling it a day's work appealed to me amazingly, for, to tell the truth, I had become heartily sick of the very sight of a dog since the Kaffir cur had started to tow me from the Dogs' Home.

On the evening preceding the important fixture, men of all sorts and sizes, accompanied by dogs of many breeds and colours, from stately mastiffs down to weasel-bodied Kaffir mongrels (pointers, setters and sporting dogs generally, were conspicuous by their absence), began to turn up at our modest four-roomed bungalow until we were at our wit's-end where and how to accommodate them for the night, while the "pack," which was kennelled *pro tem.* in the stables behind, set up a perfect pandemonium, howling and fighting like so many devils incarnate. It is a poor heart that never rejoices, however, and having despatched a couple of natives with a four-wheeled buggy to bring in all the available chairs (*i.e.* empty barrels and boxes) from a neighbouring store, M. and I set to work to prepare a huge iron pot of stew from a fine blesbok which my friend

had shot a few days before. Our thirteen guests sat in the *stoep* smoking their after-dinner pipes, and discussing the prospects of sport on the morrow over a glass of Scotch whisky, and M. and myself were placing "shake-downs" for them, when Tom P., the jovial huntsman of the then lately imported pack of English foxhounds, which was kennelled a few miles away, rode up to the bungalow with a couple of old hounds.

"Good-evening, gentlemen; the Master's compliments, and he sent old Amazon and Guardsman for you to try: I doubt neither of 'em have ever seen an otter since they were whelped, but they took kindly enough to both jackal and buck," said Tom, before burying his nose in a long sleever of "Bass."

"It's very good of Mr —— (M.F.H.), and I hope you will lend us a hand to-morrow, Tom."

"Well, gentlemen, I've only been out with otter-hounds once in my life, and that was a good many years ago; but as it's a non-hunting day with me to-morrow, I should be glad to hunt with you," was Tom's reply; and as the nights were fine and dry, he elected to take up his quarters on the *stoep* that night.

The first bright spears of the sun were beginning to bathe the summits of a distant chain of low-lying kopjes in a golden flood, when old Mamba, our Swazi servant, awoke the slumbering echoes of the bungalow by playing the devil's tattoo on a kettle, saucepan, or some other instrument of torture. Very soon every man was out of the blankets, and a general rush was made for the

little bathing-place which M. and myself had made by deepening a small willow-fringed spruit or brook that ran at no great distance from the bungalow, and which formed our matutinal place of ablution in fair weather and in foul.

It was well that we laid in a goodly store of provisions, for our guests by this time numbered no fewer than twenty-two hungry men, nearly half of whom had either hacked or driven out of Johannesburg long before sunrise, amongst them the wife of the horsedealer mentioned earlier herein, a keen little Irish sportswoman, who informed us, in the richest of brogue, that "Sure if she had a five-pound note for ivery drag she'd seen with the King's, it's a warm woman she'd be that day indade."

The expression on Tom P.'s weather-beaten face when we took him round to inspect the "pack," which was playing up merry hades in the stables, would have been worth a "Jew's eye" to a sporting artist; and no fond mother ever hugged her offspring closer in passing through a mob than did honest Tom his couple of aristocratic English foxhounds when that canine rabble tried to strike up an acquaintance with them. "'Ware cur dog, Guardsman." "Come in, Amazon." "Get out, you ugly yaller varmint" (as he took a flying kick at one of the Kaffir dogs which had evidently fallen violently in love with old Amazon). "Dear me, I never set eyes on such a lot o' rag-tail devils in all me born days," cried Tom in dismay, as he whipped off the nondescript "pack" from his beloved hounds. Gad!

they were a lot of devils, in very truth, as I, their huntsman, was bound to confess.

No sooner had the noble animals been released from durance vile than two and a half (I stick religiously to hunting technology) of the twelve and a half couple (including the three-legged spaniel) started off across the veldt on a bee-line for Johannesburg, while the Kaffir mongrel and his late companion in distress—the half-bred Airedale bitch—commenced a battle royal on the *stoep* to decide which of them should retain possession of a shoulder of blesbok that had been commandeered from the breakfast-table by the former. With much yelling and cracking of thongs a couple of men galloped off to try and turn the fleeting deserters back. They (the deserters) divided forces, however, and the gallant whippers-in only succeeded in capturing the ancient spaniel, which, as before mentioned, carried a hind leg up by choice. No use in crying over spilt milk, or rather sped curs, however, and having coupled what remained of the "pack" with pieces of old riems and rope, off we trotted for Sullivan's saloon, where we found some twenty fresh recruits waiting to be initiated into the art of otter-hunting.

It was now a good half-hour after the appointed time, and away we all started to the river, with the exception of one or two thirsty souls who remained in the bar for a second or third nerve-binder, possibly fearful that the excitement of the sport in hand would prove too much for them.

Just before the bank of the stream was reached a hare sprang from her form in a patch of rank grass, and away across the veldt she sped with the coupled, yapping curs scrapping and falling over one another like so many boys in a sack race, in their anxiety to get on terms with Mistress *Lepus capensis*, who, with one lug laid down and the other pricked, quietly loped over the arid plain as though she rather enjoyed the fun. Suddenly the air was rent with, "'Ware hare, ye varmints; 'ware riot, dang your blood! Ye ought to know better, damme, after all the larning ye had in the old country," etc.

The staid old couple of foxhounds, suddenly seized with the rioting fever of the canine rabble, had—probably for the first time in their lives since puppyhood—broken away from the astonished and outraged huntsman, and across the veldt they raced in the wake of the hare, their deep, bell-like voices almost drowning the yapping of the struggling rabble of cur dogs.

Still rating and cussing, Tom jumped on to the pony of one of the field, who, owing to a great breadth of beam, had been granted permission to ride to "hounds," and off he galloped in pursuit of Amazon and Guardsman, as though his Satanic Majesty were behind him, while the rest of the field—including M., first whip, and myself—laid into the pack with hearty goodwill. At length we had them in hand again, and five minutes later the banks of the river were being drawn: one half, led by the Airedale, working the right and the other half the left hand side. For perhaps forty minutes nothing wearing fur or hair

was moved, then suddenly one of the Kaffir dogs made a rush into a patch of scrub that grew down to the water's edge, and out bolted a *meerkat*, which led the pack a merry burst across the veldt for quite a minute and a half's duration. Then with a flirt of his tail, as though to wish his pursuers "good-bye," he disappeared into his burrow, which ran for many feet under the surface of the hard-baked earth. Some little time was wasted in getting the pack to the water again, but when finally they were whipped back to draw for the legitimate quarry, the Airedale, after feathering round a growth of dry rushes for a few moments, gave a whimper, and away along the bank she drove, with the whole canine rabble—barring the foxhounds, which, possibly mindful of the trouble they had already got into through running the hare, refused to work a yard of the trail, but kept religiously at their huntsman's heels—yowling and yapping for all they were worth.

The fun was fast and furious while it lasted, and the manner in which the man of weight rode to the flying pack and wheezingly cheered it on—in spite of ant-bear earths, meerkat holes, and other horse-traps, with which in parts the veldt was honeycombed—was refreshing to see. "Hounds" very soon came to a check, however, at the junction, a narrow but very deep spruit of the river.

Thinking it not improbable that the otter—I knew the quarry to be an otter from the working of the dogs—had taken to the smaller stream, I took the Airedael

bitch and half-a-dozen of the most likely of the mongrels (amongst them the "Kaffir"), which, although wild as hawks, possessed wonderful scent, a short distance along the spruit, while M. tried forward with the remainder.

The old bitch proved herself a rattling good worker, and along under the shelving bank she hunted until, with a whimper, she was on the trail again and going hell for leather, with the others close in her wake.

With a "halloa" to the rest of the field—only three of whom had accompanied me—I "footed it" for all I knew to keep on terms with my "flying hounds," which ran eagerly enough, and at a pace which proclaimed a breast-high scent.

Suddenly a loud "hieu gaze," from a youngster whose long legs enabled him to pass everyone on the field, caused me to put on a spurt, and looking forward I saw a fine otter running under the far bank of the stream, about three hundred yards ahead of the leading dog.

In spite of the pitiable pack of mongrels I was hunting, every nerve in my body quivered with excitement; and how I longed for a few couples of good English otter-hounds at that moment. On and on ran the gallant animal, now on the level veldt, now under the steep bank of the narrow waterway; and now those weasel-barrelled Kaffir mongrels begin to press him, and the old Airedale bitch is no laggard. The spruit widens out, and the quarry takes to the water. The "hounds" are puzzled at the sudden disappearance of their game, enabling M. and a few of the field to bring up the rest of

the yapping, howling pack. "Chain the stream below!" cries the leggy youngster, who comes rushing towards us pointing to a "chain" of air-bubbles which rise to the surface from below the turbid stream. The youngster, a West-countryman, and no novice at the sport in hand, is right. The otter finds he has made a mistake in leaving the main stream, and is trying to double back to it under cover of water.

In a moment half-a-dozen of us were up to our breasts in water, hand in hand, and with our feet moving from side to side to stop the gallant animal's passage. The motley pack are now yapping all around us, some on the bank and some in the water, amongst the latter the three-legged spaniel.

"Look out! here he comes!" shouts someone from the bank, as a volume of bubbles rise to the surface, not a dozen yards away.

"Gad! he touched my leg!" cries the centre man in a half-scared manner. A great swirl of churned-up water as the otter, frightened by the moving legs, turns, tells us that the "middle-link" does not err in the statement.

"Hieu gaze!" and begad old three-legs has him; but the old spaniel's collared him too far astern, and the otter, turning, fastens on to his canine enemy, and the pair disappear from view into the oozy depths of the stream.

"For heaven's sake, save my dog!" cries the weighty horseman, as he rolls himself out of the saddle,

and commences to run up and down the bank, as though debating within himself as to whether he should dive into the spruit and rescue gallant old "three-legs."

Suddenly the leggy youngster jumped into the stream, and as the tip of the otter's "pole" appeared above the surface of the water he had it; and the next moment, with a great swing, both dog and otter lay gasping on the veldt, for neither had released their hold, and both were too done to show further fight.

It was not without a feeling of repugnance that I saw my bobbery pack worry the last spark of life out of their gallant quarry; but were I to say that I did not enjoy my first and only otter hunt on a South African Klip River I should scarcely speak the truth.

O'GRADY'S FOX

URE, Micky, the hounds 'll meet at Hogan's Cross-roads the morrow, an' if ye come, ye'll see the grandest bit iv sport ye iver saw in all your born days," said Denis O'Grady, enthusiastically, to his boon companion, Micky McLoughlin, the Ballyhilly cobbler, as they sat together before the glowing peat fire in the kitchen of O'Grady's little homestead.

"An it's sorra the fox they'll get nearer than that ould white tagged one at Keownan's Hill, that they've hunted a hundhred times, an' might as well av ben afther a weasel in a rabbit warren, wid his twistin' an' doublin' thricks," responded McLoughlin.

"Devil the five miles they'll have to go for a fox," grinned O'Grady, "when there's the gamest an' sthraightest-necked pug in all Ireland hidin' himself for the last six months undher the roots iv the big oak in that bit iv covert iv mine in the hollow."

"Thrust you for keeping a saycret, Denis, when

there's a fox or a hare in the question," answered Micky, knocking the ashes out of his "dudeen," and turning his tumbler upside down, as a hint to his host that it was low tide with the stout.

"An' it's meself an' ould Kitty'll show them the way cross counthry, as ye'll see, Micky, if ye come to the meet, for divil the fence or sthrame'll stop the one or the t'other iv us," continued Denis, once more refilling his guest's ever-empty tumbler.

Promising to be a spectator of his friend's prowess in the hunting-field, the old shoe-doctor started homewards.

"Five miles, is it, ye say, Micky! Begorra, ye're not a man iv much invintion if ye couldn't do betther nor that, an' ould Pat, the Squire's keeper, havin' a fox to sell at your very dure," mused Denis, as the rotund figure of the cobbler disappeared from his view round a bend in the road. "Sure, an' there's no one knows betther nor meself there hasn't been a fox in the little wood for the last three saisons at laste. But I'll see the gamekeeper in purgatory before I hand him a sovereign for the mangy ould vixen he caught in the Forty Acres last harvest time." Suddenly, however, a happy thought flashed through the fertile brain of O'Grady. He would get that same mangy vixen on approbation to show "a gintleman that'd give any money to have a tame fox"; and a few minutes later he was wending his way towards the keeper's cottage, manufacturing as he went a plausible tale wherewith he might wheedle the coveted animal from the custody of "Velveteens."

"Good-night to ye, Pat, an' it's divil the penny less nor five pounds he'll give ye for the varmint if he likes it," were the rustic diplomat's parting words to the keeper, as he gleefully set off homewards, carrying on his shoulders a sack containing a sorry-looking specimen of the vulpine family. Long ere the worthy Denis, however, had reached his domicile he had transferred his "bag of tricks" to the tender care of another "gintleman," as our story will presently show.

The day was still very young when Denis's landlord, Squire Egan, and his cousin, Jack Despard, returning from an early morning gallop, met O'Grady hurrying along the road leading to his homestead, as though he were walking for a wager. As the farmer approached nearer, they saw that he was splashed with mud from head to foot, his clothes were snagged in a dozen places; in short, he bore the appearance of a man who had just been dragged through an acre of furze.

The horsemen, who were quietly walking their hacks along the turfy margin of the russet-bracken-fringed road, were almost upon Denis before he noticed them, and on the Squire hailing him with, "Good-morning, Denis. What brings you out so early in the day?" he replied, somewhat sheepishly, "Sure, your honour, I've been afther doin' some fencin' where the bullocks broke out last night, an' I got up early to have everythin' done in time for the hunt."

"And do you think we shall find a fox in that little spinney of yours to-day?" continued Egan, wondering

the while what manner of fencing could have made such a tatterdemalion of the old fellow.

"An' if I was as sartin iv a dozen iv stout as I am iv findin' a fox for the hounds this mornin', it's the happiest man in the parish I'd be," answered O'Grady, puffing away vigorously at his little black "dudeen."

"All right, Denis," laughingly returned the Squire, as his cousin and himself cantered off, "there shall be a dozen of stout waiting for you at the Hall this evening, if we find in the spinney."

"Sure, an' that stout's as safe as if Molly an' meself had it in the ould porther-case undher the bed," mused Denis, as he broke into a little jig in the middle of the muddy highway, and then, pushing his way through a convenient gap in the hedgerow, made a bee-line across the meadow which lay between the road and his thatched cottage.

It was a glorious hunting morning, and some three-score men and women attended the meet of the Ballyhilly Foxhounds at the Cross-roads, amongst whom figured conspicuously Denis O'Grady, attired in an old green hunting coat, a pair of discarded breeches and leggings, formerly the property of the local medico's coachman, a pair of wooden clogs, blue bird's-eye stock, and last, but not least, a fifty-year-old white beaver hat, which had gained a local notoriety from his having worn it in a certain Quixotic steeplechase against a horsedealer residing in the Ballyhilly district. He was mounted on old Kitty, the skittish, fiddle-headed, broken-kneed,

chestnut mare, rising nineteen years, which had carried our hero—for the most part on her neck—as far as the water-jump in the steeplechase before-mentioned, but spoiled any possible chance he might have had of winning by dumping him neck and crop into the brook; but all that is another story.

Denis at once made his way up to the huntsman, whom he urged to first draw the three-acre covert standing on the boundary of the O'Grady farm, as it was a "starin sure" find for a fox. The huntsman having facetiously congratulated him on the smart appearance of both himself and his mount, yielded to this persuasion, and away trotted the merry throng towards the spinney.

Hounds had not been in covert for many minutes when a whimper from old "Guardsman" was taken up by the full chorus of the pack, and in almost less time than it takes to write it, the "dappled beauties" were out of covert and streaming across a big grass field. Strangely enough, however, not one of the dozen or so men, who were waiting within a few yards of the very spot where the fox should have broken covert, viewed him away, nor was the soul-stirring cry of "Tally-ho! Gone away! Gone aw-a-ay!" heard from any part of the wood. There was no time to comment upon such details, however, for the pack were carrying a breast-high scent, and pointing for a lovely line of country. The M.F.H. and huntsman were the first over the big bank and newly cleaned ditch, which had to be negotiated before the grass field was entered, and pounding along in their wake came

Denis, the white beaver flying behind him attached to the end of a yard or so of black tape. With a grunt the old mare half jumped, half tumbled over the obstacle, her rider manfully and lovingly clinging round her ewe-neck, for in spite of the fact that he had rammed his bulky clogs hard home, he lost both stirrups in the encounter. By a great effort he managed, however, to clamber back into the saddle and, turning to his open-mouthed friend McLoughlin, who was waiting to witness the centaurlike manner in which Denis was to take the fence, exclaimed, "Begorra, Micky, the ould mare'd have put down Joe Widger himself over that one, for she jumped big an' landed clane on her nose, an' meself sittin' as grand an' tight as if I'd been in me ould arm-chair at home. An' ye'll see betther before the day's out," he added, as he once more settled himself in the saddle, and with a cut of his old hammer-headed crop, and a dig in her bony sides, sent his mount wheezing and pounding along on the line taken by the quickly disappearing hounds.

"Bad scran to the divils, for they're runnin' like redshanks! But sure I know the line iv the fox as well as my way home, an' I'll soon be up with them, by the short cut along the lane, but sorra the jump bigger nor a watherfurow or a whin bush'll see me till I'm there, when there's hard footin' convanient all the way," soliloquised Denis, as he turned off at a tangent before reaching the stiff double fence beyond which yawned an eighteen-foot brook.

Upon reaching the grassy lane he set Kitty going "hell for leather" and as he saw one of the field disappear into the water he chuckled; "there's one iv them down for a swim in the brook, begob, an' me sailin' along as dhry an' comfortable as the Lord Mayor iv Dublin in his goolden coach to the sessions."

Denis's jubilant tone suddenly altered, however, and his face was momentarily clouded as he murmured uneasily, "A suckin' pig'll pay the keeper, but sure there'll be holy murdher entirely if Pether hasn't put down the fox as I tould him." Then, as suddenly regaining his wonted cheerfulness, he administered several resounding "rib binders" to the sides of the old mare and burst forth into the following impromptu and inspiriting lines:—

"Come up, me ould darlin', an' hould in your breath,
Let's both stop complainin' till we're in at the death."

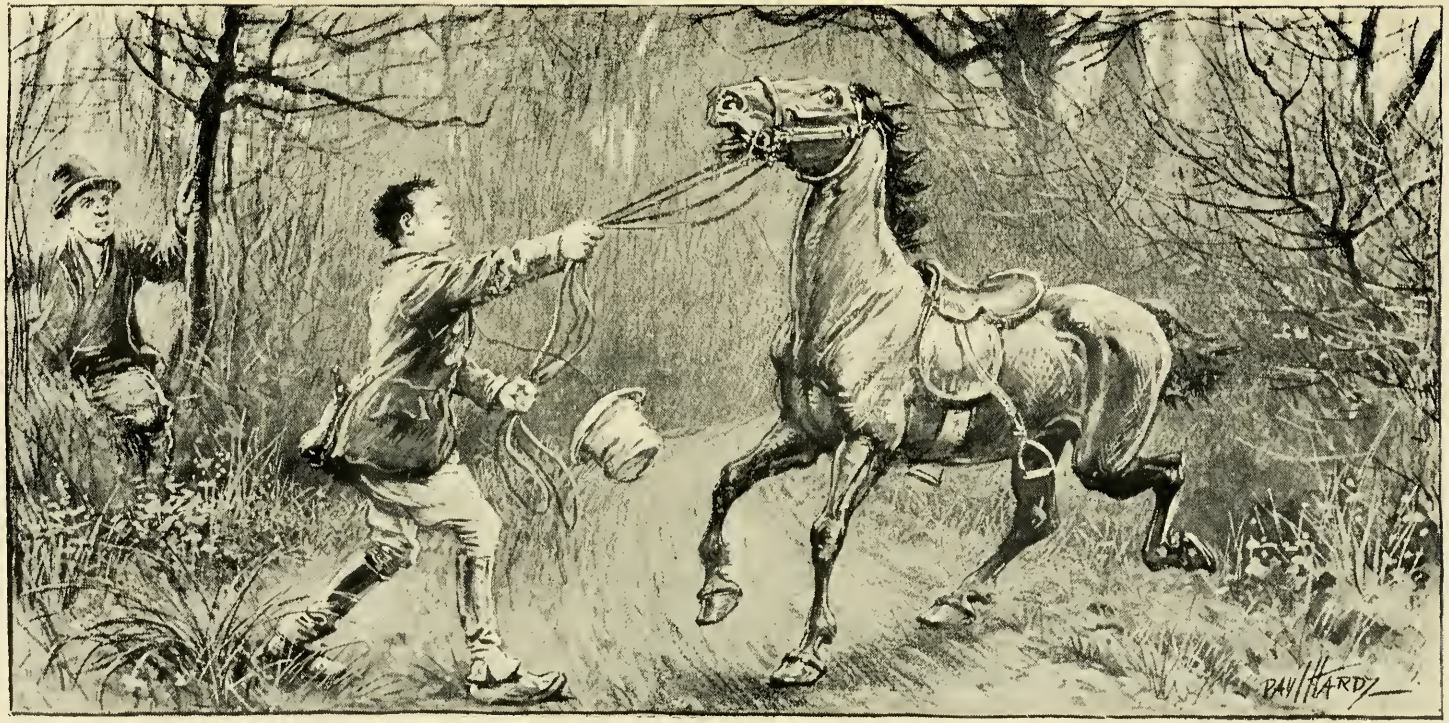
Kitty responded by see-sawing her way up the lane crab-fashion, greatly to the discomfort of her poetical rider, whose hat, having lost much of its brown paper ballast at the first fence, persisted in balancing itself on the extremity of his tip-tilted and rubicund nose.

"Hould hard, ye ould divil, till I put me hat straight. Hould hard!" he cried as he vainly hauled and tugged at the cast-iron mouth of his unruly mount. "Whoa! ye ugly disthressin' baste, an' may the divil fly away wid ye for a motion car!" continued he, bestowing a plentiful share of "long oats!" on the flanks and ribs

of "Catherine." Neither by coaxing, thrashing, nor swearing, however, could he persuade his fiery "Bucephalus" to stand for a moment, for the hound-music had stirred up some of the blood that in her youthful days had gained a famous name for the old huntress in the field. "Sure, an' ye may as well thry to stop the tide wid a pitchfork," despairingly muttered Denis, as with aching arms he once more let Kitty have her head.

The words were scarcely uttered when down dropped the beaver once more over his eyes, and up went the mare's heels, sending him flying head foremost into a bed of rank weeds and nettles. But little the worse for his "purler," O'Grady, still holding the bridle-rein, scrambled to his feet, the whole of his head and face, with the exception of a small portion of chin, enveloped in the concertina-like folds of the antique beaver. Feeling his way along the reins, he extricated himself from the venom-laden herbage, and then with his free hand proceeded to remove the blinding headgear.

"An' it's standin' there ye are, lookin' so silly an' sneerin' afther thryin' to break your masther's neck, ye ungrateful ould buck-jumper," angrily exclaimed the fallen rider. "But sure, an' ye'll have the dacency to let me get asthride iv your bellows again," he continued, making a few desperate but ineffectual thrusts at the rusty stirrup-iron with the clumsy toe of this clog. But Kitty grew more restive than ever, and tried her hardest to shoulder Denis into the ditch running at the side of



"AN' HAS THE OULD BASTE PUT YE DOWN, DENIS?"

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the lane. Indeed, he was beginning to think that he would have to lead her ignominiously home, when the little round cobbler emerged from a gap in the hedge, puffing and blowing like a stranded grampus.

"An' has the ould baste put ye down, Denis?" wheezed out McLoughlin, when he had sufficiently recovered his breath to speak.

"Musha, ye ould fool, ye should know betther nor ask such a question, for ye've niver seen the horse yet thet'd put me down. Sure, I got off to tighten the girths, for me hunter blew herself out like the blacksmith's bellows when I put the saddle on her this mornin'."

"But, troth, an' your hat looks like ould Barney the sexton's melojin," continued the cobbler, as he eyed the shapeless form of the beaver.

"Arrah, Micky, I jumped on the top iv it, for it fell off when I was gettin' down; but don't stand bletherin' like an ijiot, so give me a leg up, for Terry'll be cursin' me like a throoper for not givin' him a hand wid the hounds, an' meself dyin' to be up wid thim into the bargain."

The cobbler did as requested, eyeing the while the half yard of black tape from which the hat was suspended, and wondering by what sort of miracle the beaver could possibly have got beneath O'Grady's feet.

Bidding Micky to keep as close to the mare's heels as possible if he wanted to see any more of the run that day, away ambled Denis in pursuit of the hounds, whose voices by this time had almost died away. A ten

minutes' canter along the friendly lane carried him to a rise in the ground, when, as he had anticipated, he found that the pack had swung left-handed, and were pointing almost straight for him.

"Musha, the divil couldn't av done it betther to save his life," murmured Denis joyfully to himself, as he watched the hounds racing towards him, far ahead of the field. "An' it's all plain sailin', an' plenty of convanient gaps between this an' Pether's farm, an' may the divil mend me if I don't show old Terry, the huntsman, an' the whole lot iv them, a clane pair iv heels till we've run intil the fox, for the mare's as fresh as powdher, an' as game as ould 'Donovan' when he won the Grand National."

Screening himself from the view of the field behind a tall clump of blackthorn bushes, Denis waited until the last hound had crossed the lane, and then administering a thundering volley of "clog-reminders" to the bony barrel of his ancient mount, he rammed her through a weak place in the hedge, and went bumping along in the wake of the flying pack. "Forrard, forrard, forrard, me ould darlin'!" cried he as he heard the sound of the Master and huntsman galloping hard towards him at no great distance in the rear. On and on sped the old mare, and, considering her age, right well did she hold her own, and as she gallantly flew the little bank, topped by a low, quick-set fence, bounding the meadow leading into Peter's farm, her rider exclaimed, as once more he wriggled from her withers into the saddle: "Musha,

it's the grand bit iv blood an' bone ye are, me darlin', and it's none iv their new-fangled hunters can touch ye yet."

Just before reaching Peter's homestead, hounds came to an abrupt check, and for a few minutes appeared utterly at fault. By making a wide cast forward, however, the huntsman soon had the pack on the line again, but strangely enough the hitherto "straight-necked" fox had doubled like a hare, and the breast-high scent became very patchy and uncertain.

"Begorra, it's the grand cast ould Terry has made, an' I couldn't have done it much betther meself wid the baigles," chuckled O'Grady, as the hounds once more hit off the scent, "but bad luck to the little red divil before them for ladin' us over the stiffest leps in all the counthry," he continued, as old Amazon, after feathering round a thick hedgerow for a few moments, led the pack towards a hilly stretch of stiffly fenced ploughs and pastures. A happy thought suddenly struck him, however, as he eyed the ponderous form of an 18-stone yeoman neighbour, who, mounted on a huge, upstanding, half-bred cart mare, went lurching along a few lengths ahead of him like a Dutch galleon in a heavy sea.

"Sure, an' I'll stick as tight to ould ton-an'-a-half an' his ploutherin' elephant as a tick till a rabbit, for he makes a gap through ivery fence that ye could dhrive a coach-an'-four through."

Hounds were now running much slower than before, and keeping close in the wake of his heavy pilot, Denis

managed to see a good deal of the work done. So intent was he, indeed, in watching the clever manner in which Terry handled his pack, that he took no notice whither the hunt was heading, until a group of gesticulating rustics informed him that he was within sight of the cottage of his friend, Pat Maloney, the gamekeeper, for whom, we may here mention, he had as yet no message regarding the sale of the tame vixen.

"Whoa, me ould darlin'! Hould hard, ye ugly, cantankerous baste!" exclaimed the veteran, as he pulled up Kitty, who for some little time had been wheezing out "bellows to mend." Then, having got her to stand, he, from the safe harbourage of a tall clump of thorns, watched the hounds pour over the garden railings of the cottage in a living, dappled torrent, while the keeper laid around him with a stout ground-ash sapling.

"Musha, an' it's the grand bit iv divarshin they're havin' for a finish, but I'm thinkin', me darlin', we're betther away from the quarrelsome blackguards," quoth the rustic sportsman, as he fondly patted the ewe-neck of the ancient chestnut. "But why didn't that omadhaun, Pether, start the mangy varmint in some other direction; an' may the saints forgive me for givin' him a shillin' that'd have brought a good half-dozen iv stout for meself an' Micky," he continued, piously, as he thought sadly of his ill-bestowed bounty. "Anyway, here's good health to ye, Pat, but, sure, the gintleman doesn't want the fox, an' I've seen it safe back to your

own dure," concluded O'Grady, taking a long pull at a large bottle of whisky before jogging off homewards.

Anxious inquiries were made for the owner of the white hat, not only by the infuriated guardian of the mangy vixen, but also by the Master of the Ballyhilly Foxhounds and his huntsman. The Squire, turning to his cousin, suggested that the much-sought-after Denis had, in all probability, returned hurriedly home to do some more neglected hedging and ditching.

" Devil a bit," replied Despard, " he's off to the Hall to fetch his well-earned dozen of stout."

WILDFOWLING AFLOAT

T be a-snowin' and a-blowin' from the nor' - east masterful hard, gen'lemen, and ye musn't dream of takin' the gunnin'-punt outside the creek this night," shouted old Gilson, the skipper, down the skylight as Jack M. and myself sat smoking and chatting in the cabin of the 15-ton yawl, *Seamew*. The yacht was lying snugly at anchor in one of the many creeks debouching on the southern shore of the Isle of Sheppy, after a somewhat rough passage from the river Deben. Neither of us were surprised to hear of the sudden downfall of snow, as great banks of dark clouds had been gathering on the eastern horizon long before the sunset, and the thermometer gradually falling all day. The skipper did not err in stating it was " a-snowin' and a-blowin' masterful hard," for so thickly did the gale-driven flakes fall that it was difficult to distinguish objects lying a dozen yards from our " floating cottage," and, although the tide in our little haven of refuge was

as smooth as the proverbial mill-pond, the white-crested rollers of the North Sea broke with a sound like thunder upon Shellness Point.

To the south of our anchorage lay a wide expanse of saltings and dyke-intersected marshes. It was amongst those wind-swept levels that "A Son of the Marshes" spent the early years of his all too short life, and on this wild night, as my sailing companion and I sat reading his "Drift from the Foreshore" before our glowing cabin-stove, the weird cry of the curlew, the hoarse honkings of wild geese, the merry cackle of the mallard, and the shrill "whe-oh" of the pigeon came to us above the roaring of the gale, just as did that fowl-music to the ears of the dead naturalist and his marshland companions winters and winters ago.

As the cabin clock was striking the hour of seven next morning, I was awakened by the stentorian voice of M. bidding me, as a sluggard, "Turn out," or be hanged. Now, the deck of a small yacht on a bitterly cold morning does not bear a particularly comfortable appearance. I crawled out of my bunk, however, and into my clothes, took a long and wistful look at the glowing coals in the stove, and blundered on deck, to find that, although the gale had almost blown itself out, the sails and rigging were stiff with frost. The skipper, from whose tip-tilted and rubicund nose was gracefully suspended an ethereal dew-drop (he is never without one during cold weather), shovelled away the snow from the

well and coach-roof, while M. was busily engaged in shortening the cable.

"The captain of yonder bawley," said the latter, as he pointed in the direction of a small fishing smack, which had just entered the creek, "tells me he sighted a big company of duck while passing the Mouse lightship. If you'll help Gilson with the mainsail, I'll get the anchor in board." I looked at the halliards, which were thickly coated with ice and, to hide my distress, asked, as cheerfully as circumstances would allow, whether there was sufficient water in the creek to float the yawl out that tide.

"Yes, if you will but hoist the mainsail instead of playing the fool," replied Jack, who bore the cold in the most unconcerned manner, I thought.

With purple, aching fingers I commenced to unstop the mainsail. Next I hauled on the peak and the skipper on the throat-halliards, and together we managed to set the big sail. "Ease your main sheet and shave the floating beacon!" roared M., as the anchor came up with a run. More than once the keel of the *Seamew* touched ground, but at length she was safely in the deeper fairway of the Swale, and, with sheets flattened and lee-rail awash, the staunch little vessel began to fight her way seaward against a stiff nor'-easterly wind.

Leaving Jack and the skipper to sail the ship, I went below to cook a goodly dish of ham and eggs for breakfast. Old Gilson had signed on as skipper and cook; he did not, however, shine brilliantly in the latter

capacity, and, as M. declared he knew not how to boil an egg, the culinary department aboard the *Seamew* has for a good many years been managed by myself. Thanks to the excellent little stove with which the fo'c'stle of the yawl is furnished, my occupation, in spite of the pitching of the boat, was soon finished, and upon going into the well to bid my companion "eat, drink, and be merry," I discovered we were quite clear of the Swale and racing through the heavy seas towards the Mouse.

"Have you sighted any fowl?" was my first inquiry of M., who, with the end of the tiller jammed into the small of his back, was sweeping the water with a pair of Ross prisms. "Not a feather beyond a few scoters and an odd loon or two," replied Jack. "But what kind of fowl are those paddling in the little bay beyond the lightship?" asked he, pointing in the direction of a number of dark spots, which, viewed from the well of the yawl, bobbed up and down on the tide. I ventured to suggest that the birds were a flock of cob-gulls, but scarcely were the words uttered than the skipper, who from the bows had been watching the fowl through a pair of battered binoculars, cried, "Hinter be a tidy paddlin' o' mallard!" The keen-sighted old gunner spoke truly. It was a paddling of common wild duck that had puzzled M. and myself so confoundedly. The company, consisting of between forty and fifty head, was resting in a small bay on the edge of Foulness sands, and, as far as we were able to judge, the birds were "bunched" sufficiently well to warrant a "set" being

made to them in the gunning-punt. True, a fairly heavy sea was still running in the fairway, but the tide was very low, and the water remaining on the sands was comparatively smooth.

Gilson now took the tiller, while M. and myself lifted the 1½-in. bore swivel gun from its slings in the cabin, and placed it on deck ready to hand. On and on we raced, nearer and nearer to the fowl, until but a short quarter of a knot lay between them and ourselves. The yawl was, therefore, hove-to, and the punt hauled up alongside. The big gun was next rigged in the bows of the punt, and then arose the question as to who should act the part of gunner and who wield the paddle and setting pole. A coin of the realm was tossed to solve the knotty problem, and, as is usually the case, the propulsion of the craft fell to my lot. A double-handed shooting punt carrying a 1½-in. breech-loading stanchion gun and two men is not easy to navigate in anything like rough water, and M. and myself had a pretty wet time of it until the smooth tide running over the sands was reached. Having made a wide detour to get the wind in our favour, my companion unshipped his sculls and crept forward to work the gun, while I took the paddle and kept the nose of the tide-carried punt pointing toward the paddling. On and on the low, grey craft crept nearer and nearer to the duck, until they were almost within range of the big gun rigged in her bows; and still those usually wideawake fowl did not appear to be aware of the danger that lurked so near at hand. Possibly they were unable to see the

slowly approaching punt above the top of a ridge of sand which lay high and dry between the birds and ourselves. Then, again, we were setting to them dead up-wind, and consequently they were unable to scent us. Suddenly, however, up went the head of the nearest sentinel, and the next moment, with a great to-do, the whole of the company rose like one bird. The wings of the mallard had barely cleared the surface of the water when Jack sent twenty ounces of lead into the "brown" of them, and when the smoke of the heavy charge of black powder cleared away we saw seven fat mallard lying motionless on the water, while a leash of lively cripples vainly endeavoured to rise and follow in the wake of their more fortunate fellows. "Watch for droppers," said Jack, as he followed the line taken by the fleeting duck. I watched until they were but mere specks on the sky-line, but never a bird faltered in its flight.

The wounded were soon put *hors de combat* with the "cripple-stopper," and, having gathered the slain, we pulled back with all haste to the *Seamew*, for, as though by magic, a dull, smoky-looking cloud began to rise and swell in volume upon the eastern horizon. It was a dense bank of sea-fog driving rapidly up from the North Sea, and we should have stood a very poor chance of finding the yacht had she once become enveloped in that thick grey vapour.

As we brought-up alongside, Gilson, who had been watching our every movement through his ancient glasses, congratulated us on the success of our expedition,

with the remark, "'Twas as masterful a 'set' as I've seen made to fowl for many a long day, and it wor a wholly long shot, Maister Jack, and ye cut 'em down bootiful, ay, bootiful!" "But," added the old chap, "do 'ee get aboard smart-like, for us should run for shelter afore the cussed fog overhauls us."

To unrig the stanchion gun from the punt and hoist it aboard the yacht was but the work of a very few minutes, and the *Seamew* was sent "up-along" towards the safe harbourage of Leigh Swatchway. Before the Nore lightship was fetched, however, the breeze, which had been gradually waning, died away almost to a dead calm, and the fog came rolling on and over the foam-flecked waters until the headlands and shipping lying away to the eastward were veiled within the folds of the wreathing grey vapour.

"There's nothin' for it but to lie here till the fog lifts, and heaven knows when that will be," growled the skipper, as he went forward to let go the anchor.

There was a good deal of shipping passing up and down the fairway, and the discord set up by the sirens and foghorns was quite pandemonic. Fortunately we were berthed on the safe side of the buoys, but even then more than one huge liner and rusty-sided "tramp" passed unpleasantly near the *Seamew*. For six mortal hours that sea-fog held us in its chill and sullen thraldom, and when it did lift sufficiently to allow us to again get under way, the first shades of night had already fallen. The prospects of further sport that day were, therefore,

not particularly encouraging, and, although there should have been an excellent "fowling moon" later, such unbroken masses of dark snow-clouds floated threateningly overhead that we entertained but little hope of using the punt in New England Creek, wherein we had elected to anchor for the night. Good luck, however, often falls to the lot of the wildfowler when he least expects it.

It was nearly six o'clock when the skipper, who was keeping a sharp look-out from the bows and feeling the way carefully, with the lead-line across the treacherous sands, suddenly cried, "Bear up a bit, sir, and you'll fetch the mouth o' the creek bootiful."

The dim outline of the snow-clad sea-walls surrounding the marshland island of New England now loomed through the uncertain light, and, thanks to a high spring tide, we managed to escape the many mudbanks and shoals with which our haven of refuge was well endowed, and to find a comfortable berth almost abreast the island homestead.

M. and myself had finished our frugal dinner, and were discussing plans for the morrow over a pipe and a glass of reeking grog, when the skipper came into the cabin and opened as follows :—"It'll be a masterful good night for gunnin', and I can hear fowl a-callin' like a farmyard at feedin'-time. Would ye take it amiss, Maister Jack, if I wor to take the dinghy and my owd gun down to the P'int Salts to see if I can pick up a bird or two ?"

Needless to say, the old chap's request was readily granted, and no sooner had he pulled away from the yacht than my host suggested that we should also try our luck in the upper reaches of the creek.

It was indeed an ideal night for wildfowling; the wind was favourable, and the cloud-flecked moon threw just sufficient light to enable one to follow the movements of birds on the water or as they nimbly quartered the ooze-flats and blackgrounds in search of food. The moon was, fortunately, right ahead of us, and, keeping well under the left-hand shore of the creek, M. steered the tide-carried punt past the many points and juts of the glasswort-fringed salt marshes.

"Hark! Did you hear that widgeon?" whispered my companion, just as we were entering a small bay in the salts. I had heard the shrill "whe-oh" of a widgeon, and the call appeared to come from close at hand. Suddenly four dark forms emerged from the mouth of a muddy rill, which wormed its sinuous way through an evil-smelling patch of sludge until it emptied itself in the creek about sixty yards distant from the punt. It was easy to see that the forms in question were duck of some kind, and a second "whe-oh" from one of them dispelled any possible doubts one might have entertained regarding their species. Not a sound escaped the lips of my companion, but from the manner in which he steered the punt I knew that he had also seen the widgeon. On and on we drew gradually and noiselessly towards them, until but thirty-five yards or so of water lay between the

muzzles of the cripple-stopper and the fowl. Resting the gun on the fore-coaming, I pulled at a couple swimming almost breast to breast, and as the report rang out over the frozen marshes both birds turned paddles upward. The remaining brace flew off unscathed, for, to my disgust, the second barrel proved a miss-fire. Having gathered the widgeon, we advanced higher up the creek, but during the next hour nothing wearing feathers was met with.

At length the welcome call of a grey plover came to our ears, and, peering over the fore-coaming, I carefully scanned every inch of the moon-lighted ooze lying ahead. "Don't you see them?" asked my companion in a low whisper, as we neared a long spit of shelving mud situate at the junction of a smaller waterway with New England Creek. For a few minutes I could discern nothing bearing the smallest resemblance to birds, but a closer scrutiny of the ooze-flat revealed a small flock of waders nimbly dodging here and there over its glistening surface.

"Grey plover! Let 'em have the big gun!" said Jack, almost inaudibly.

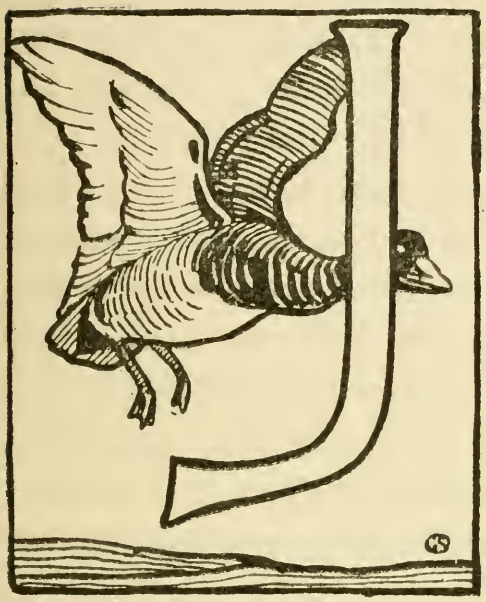
But at that very moment the deep boom of old Gilson's eight-bore muzzleloader broke the dead silence which reigned over that vast expanse of saltings, marsh, and tide-way, and up rose the plover rather scattered.

"A clean miss, begad!" said M. disgustedly, after I had pulled the trigger-line, adding, "I thought you were good for at least a dozen of them."

Bad shot though it was, it proved not a clean miss, for a leash of fat plover, gathered from the mud a few moments later, belied Jack's somewhat hasty exclamation. That was the last shot of the night, for, although we continued to explore higher reaches of the creek several hours longer, nothing was met with worthy of powder and shot. Upon returning to the yawl we saw a couple of curlew hanging from the rigging which had fallen to our worthy old skipper's eight-bore.

"Seven mallard, a brace of widgeon, a couple of curlew, and a leash of plover. Not a bad bag for the first day of the cold snap," said J., as he sat over the cabin stove puffing away at his favourite briar. I thought the same, but wisely held my peace, knowing full well that more of the last-named birds should at that moment have been hanging up on the stays of the good yawl *Seamew*.

BY THE LIGHT O' THE MOON



JACK TANKERTON was slumbering peacefully after a long and exciting run with the Chivychase Hounds, when a shower of pebbles rattled against the window of his bedroom. Hastily jumping out of bed, he pulled aside the curtains, and by the light of the full moon he saw the local *medico*, with a gun over his shoulder, in the act of gathering from the garden path a fresh supply of missiles with which to again bombard the window. Upon catching sight of Jack, the jovial surgeon—a red-headed son of Erin, standing some five feet nothing in his stockings—let fly with the pebbles and vociferously opened as follows :—

" Och ! an' it's the disthressing lot iv unsportsmanlike divils ye all are to be snorin' between the blankets on such a beautiful night as this, with the moon shinin' like a jewel an' the drains [dykes] so full iv duck that they're runnin' bank high with the weight and——"

" Oh, hang the duck and yourself to boot ! " cried

Jack, anxious to stop the Irishman's flow of eloquence, and feeling anything but pleased at being awakened from his hard-earned rest at one o'clock in the morning to go in search of duck which were usually conspicuous by their absence in the neighbouring marsh, that formed the happy fowling-ground of every man and boy possessed of a "shooting-iron" for miles round.

"Och, man, get into your clothes, and don't stand swearin' and shiverin' up there. Sure an' your language is nearly as bad as was the curate's a few minutes ago, when by accident I broke his bedroom window wid a little stone that one wouldn't have thought would hurt a fly," went on Jack's tormentor, adding, "Be quick, man, an' don't forget to bring a dhrop iv the 'spirit iv friendship' wid you. I left me flask at home, an' the night's divilish cold."

Jack, knowing full well that the little Irishman would continue to pelt at the window until he (Jack) joined him on what would probably prove a wild-goose chase in more senses than one, dressed pessimistically, took his favourite old 12-bore and half-a-dozen cartridges, and then blundered downstairs, muttering far worse language, we fear, than the before-mentioned sporting parson ever dreamed of.

In spite of the fact that Tankerton was not at all sanguine of obtaining a shot at anything worth powder and shot on the marsh, once away from his warm and comfortable "lair" he was glad to be in the open air. It was one of those glorious nights upon which one may

almost read a newspaper by the light of the moon, and the slight fall of snow that carpeted the frozen marshes deadened the footfalls of his companion and himself as they walked towards a long, narrow fleet of fresh water which lay glinting under the moonbeams.

Very soon the gunners met with a wide, sedge-fringed dyke that led to the fleet, and the doctor taking one side of the same, and Jack the other, they started forward, keeping the moon directly between themselves and the fleet. Suddenly the "scape, scape," of a snipe put Tankerton on the *qui vive*, and the next moment the long-bill went screwing up the moonlit dyke as though the devil were behind it. Jack was in the act of pulling when the report of the Irishman's gun rang out, awakening the dead silence that reigned over the marshes, and, greatly to the surprise of the former, the "long-bill" dropped like a limp rag on to a patch of cat-ice bordering the side of the dyke. Highly delighted at the success of his shot, the doctor pulled up his thigh boots and waded in to retrieve the bird.

An old bald coot next blundered out of the sedgy drain, and away over the marsh he sped like a bird of ill-omen.

"Why didn't ye shoot that ould divil?" asked the doctor disgustedly, as the coot sailed safely out of sight and gunshot. "His breast would eat better than any mallard's."

During a somewhat lengthy acquaintance, Jack had learned that the good surgeon was not over-particular

as to what he tackled in the way of food; but Tankerton found it hard to believe that even he could by any stretch of imagination declare the flesh of an ancient and fishlike coot to be superior in flavour to that of a mallard.

Promising to be more careful in future, and to blaze away at anything wearing feathers that might happen to get up, were it coot, owl, mallard or dabchick, Jack once more proceeded on his beat, while the restless Irishman went off to try another drain lying a little farther afield across the marshes. Every now and again the plaintive calling of a bunch of lapwings passing at no great distance away, but quite invisible in the uncertain moonlight, greeted Tankerton's ears, and once he heard the merry cackle of mallard overheard. Nothing came within shot of him, however, during the remainder of his walk along the dyke, and upon arriving at the head of the fleet he sat on the stump of an old tree to await the advent of his companion, who had wandered the deuce knew where.

Phew! it was thundering cold waiting on that old stump in the middle of an unsheltered bog, with the thermometer registering several degrees of frost, and a biting nor'-easter driving in from the sea to search out every nook and corner of the frozen levels. Thanks to the doctor's gentle hint regarding the "spirit of friendship," Jack had a goodly supply of medical comfort in the shape of good old Scotch whisky, and in spite of being taught from boyhood that a wildfowler should

never touch intoxicants of any kind when in pursuit of his quarry, we fear, were the question put to our friend, Jack Tankerton, that he would, as a truthful man, feel bound to confess that upon this particular occasion he derived much warmth and comfort from taking occasional nips at his flask, while the doctor is ever ready to declare that "a dhrop of the craythe is better than all the tay an' other ould woman's slops in the world."

But here comes the worthy *medico*, and now for the fleet.

"Sure, an' if you'll take the left-hand side iv the wather, Oi'll shoot the right; ye know all the duck keep under the left-hand bank," said the unselfish surgeon, after pledging the health of his fellow-gunner in a longish pull of the "spirit of friendship." He then hurried off along the right-hand shore of the narrow lagoon without waiting to hear whether Jack acquiesced or objected to this somewhat one-sided suggestion.

Now, why all the duck (Mallow Marsh yields, on an average, about a dozen couple of mallard per season) inhabiting the fleet should choose the left-hand shore of the same was difficult to understand, considering there was scarcely sufficient reed-cover on that side to harbour a sparrow, whereas high and dense growths of wild rice and other aquatic plants fringed the other shore. Jack had no opportunity to argue the point, however, and, picking his steps as gingerly as possible over the spongy ground, he once more set forth to slay, or, rather, to look for something to slay.

The hardy gunners had not moved very far when a moorhen blundered out of a clump of reeds almost at the doctor's feet, who, with a cry of "Take that, ye ploutherin' elephant," loosed off both barrels at the unoffending bird, which, however, flew off unscathed and clucking as though he rather liked it. Muttering something about "the black divil having carried away more lead wid him than he would be able to digest in his natural life," the Irishman rammed a couple of fresh cartridges into his gun and recommenced bog trotting.

At length the gunners arrived at a narrow part of the fleet, and suddenly, with a great to do, some six or seven mallard rose from the reeds on the doctor's side of the water. The birds flew beautifully for both men, and as they flashed through the moonbeams four barrels rang out simultaneously, but never a duck dropped.

Scarcely had the report of the firing died away than an unearthly kind of yell re-echoed across the frozen marshes, and a few moments later a hoarse and angry, "Wheer the —— be ye a-shootin' to, ye blazin' Cockneys? You've very nigh killed me mate with your cussed shots, and I be a-comin' to kill one or both of ye out and out," caused the gunners to halt and hold a pow-wow across the water.

The noise of a boat being swiftly poled through the water now reached the tingling ears of our gallant friends, and, muttering something about lying under the sea-wall for the morning flight, the Irishman took

a bee-line across the marshes. Jack Tankerton also retraced his footsteps, nor did he walk as gingerly as before.

. . . . . .

"Begorra, man, an' you'd better get up a syndicate to work the mineral rights you've just acquired. I never saw a man so rich in lead in all me life before," coolly remarked the sporting surgeon of Mudleigh as he probed out the twenty-seventh shot pellet from the buttocks of Bully Tompkins, the giant eel-catcher, who had just been brought into Dr Patrick O'Leary's surgery by his mate, Bill Gibson, to have an ounce or so of No. 4 shot extracted from the lower part of his anatomy.

"I don't know naught about sinikits, maister," groaned the guernsey-clad giant in reply to the doctor's pleasantry, "but if ever Bill or me comes to l'arn who was the skulking varmints as peppered us on the fleet 's marning, well, domned if we 'on't wring the —— necks off 'em."

"Quite right, me man," quoth the little surgeon, as he popped a sovereign into the willing fist of the eel-catcher, just by way of a *largesse*, don't you know.

"I reckons it wor Ginger as done it, don't 'ee mate?" grinningly remarked Bill Gibson to his friend as the worthy pair of marshmen left the surgery.

"In course it wor; and he can heve a shot at t'other side for another of they 'yaller boys.' But let's christen this 'un fust," was the giant's reply, as they headed for the "Bull and Badger."

RUFFED GROUSE AND WOODCOCK SHOOTING

IT was a glorious autumnal morning when G——, a young Canadian mining engineer, and the writer, accompanied by a cross-bred retriever - spaniel, left the picturesque little settlement of Muskoka for a day's grouse shooting in the lake woods, which lay some six miles from the settlement.

A great part of the way led along the lake shore, and delightful was it to watch the different kinds of fish basking under the rays of the hot sun, in the crystal clear water. Trout, pickerel, perch and sunfish were to be seen on every gravelly shallow. Dotted here and there upon the mirror-like surface of the wide, forest-fringed sheet of water, were the boats of the whitefish-catchers, the crews of which were busily engaged in their occupation. One party of fishermen, consisting of three blanket-clad Indians, were silently angling from their quaintly fashioned birch-bark canoe, for any finned creatures sufficiently uneducated to take the huge cubes of salt pork, which they had stuck upon

their great hooks. The pickerel, like the redskin, is by no means epicurean in habit, however, and the silent anglers appeared to capture those fish with their rough tackle almost as fast as they were able to bait the hooks, and haul in board. Mallard, pochard, garrot, and blue-wing teal, paddled in and out of the small channels amongst the tall reeds, and water-plantains. They kept well out of range of the shore, however, and, although an occasional snapshot might have been taken at coots as they stole through the dense reed cover, we did not deem them worthy of a cartridge.

An hour's walk took my companion and myself to a narrow forest path, known as Indian Trail, which ran through some of the most beautiful sylvan scenery imaginable. The foliage of the giant trees and undergrowth was beginning to assume its glorious autumnal tints; the woods were still gay with brilliantly tinted flowers, and gorgeously plumaged birds, including the Baltimore oriole, blue jay, scarlet tanager, purple grakle, and blue bird, which flitted across the narrow forest trail.

At length we arrived at a roughly constructed trestle bridge, spanning a charming little trout stream, from which, my companion told me, he had often 'ticed a creel of speckled beauties before breakfast. To the right of the bridge, looking up the stream, was a long strip of thick covert nearly a mile in length, with a clump of tall copper beech-trees at the farther end, and several acres of dry brake and raspberry canes growing round them. To the left, following the downward course of the

little river, as it swept away to feed the lake, was a wide stretch of fairly open woodlands. A small tract of boggy ground interposed between the open woodlands and the path along which we were travelling. This bog was interspersed with thorn, willow and cedar (deciduous) bushes, and was pent up by sallow-fringed water dykes, which G—— informed me held both duck and snipe a little later in the season.

"There is our grouse and cock ground," laughingly exclaimed the Canadian, making a circular sweep with his hand, as though every acre of the surrounding territory were his, whereas every square foot of uncleared woodland and swamp for many miles round was Government property. "We will follow the course of the creek [river] until we reach the big cedar swamp. Take the inside beat, and look out for a wood-duck or green-wing," added he.

The almost untrodden banks of the stream were carpeted with luxuriant growths of feathery ferns, bracken, and a beautiful fernlike plant, misnamed giant maidenhair, while tall reeds and sedges fringed either side and afforded harbourage to duck, and other kinds of waterfowl. We had just entered a patch of wild raspberry canes, and were enjoying the delicately flavoured fruit of the same, when the dog commenced yapping round a clump of tangled undergrowth. "Rabbit; get to him straight away," said G——, who, like the good-natured fellow he was, seemed most anxious to show me—a newly imported Britisher—sport.

Before I had time to get up, a big porcupine bolted out of the brake with every quill erect, and with the dog snapping at his heels. I was in the act of pulling at the animal as it ran across a small clearing, when G—— shouted, "Don't shoot; knock the beast on the head." Now, although in reality almost as harmless as the common hedgehog, an enraged porcupine is a formidable-looking customer, and having learned to my sorrow how simple a matter it is to break the stock of one's gun by striking it against anything animate, or inanimate, I looked round for a tree or bush from which to cut a stick. But before I succeeded in sawing through, with my knife, a particularly tough hickory bough, the quarry had climbed into a spruce fir, amongst the topmost branches of which he sat grunting and showing his teeth. "Give me a hump up, friend," said G——, who now joined me with something very like a grin overspreading his lean, sun-tanned face. "Don't be afraid to hit him when I hustle him out of his 'crony,' for he won't bite," added G——, as he commenced to swarm up the resinous trunk of the tree. After a good deal of poking and shaking, the porcupine was dislodged from his bough and dropped on all-fours within a foot of where I was standing. Still uttering pig-like grunts, away he started towards the next spruce, but the dog succeeded in turning him into a wide clearing ere he gained the tree, and off went I in pursuit, tripping over hidden stumps and logs as I ran. For a few minutes our strange-looking quarry led us a merry hunt; but at length it was driven into a

tangle of wild vines and creepers, and despatched with a knock on the head by my companion, who remarked, "Guess you wouldn't make your 'pile' porcupine catching," as he hocked the kill and hung it on the branch of a pine-tree to be called for on the return journey. I "guessed" likewise, and started along the bank of the brook again.

For perhaps a mile, with the exception of a few shrieking jays and a black woodpecker, not a "feather" was moved, but, when rounding a curve of the stream, G—— clutched my sleeve and whispered, "Look under yonder shelving bank; wood-duck." Scarcely were the words uttered when a couple of those beautiful duck rose from the opposite bank of the stream. Singling out the leading bird, I fired; but to my disgust the shot-pellets struck the water a good foot below it, and before I could get in the second barrel the duck had passed out of sight round the curve of the brook. H—— managed to stop the other, however, and a few moments later old Jake laid it at his master's feet with scarcely a feather displaced.

We had not long entered the first patch of bush growing on what G—— facetiously called the "grouse-moor," when the dog flushed from a bed of whortleberries four ruffed grouse (*Bonasia umbellus*), or, as my Canadian friend had them, pheasants. The grouse rose within easy shot, and G—— killed a fine old cock in magnificent plumage with his "single" 10-bore; but once more I missed clean with my first barrel, and only succeeded in

THE DOG FLUSHED FOUR RUFFED GROUSE

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"winging" a hen in immature plumage with my left; which led the dog a merry dance amongst the berries and dense undergrowth before it was safely gathered. The remaining brace of grouse were soon lost to sight behind a belt of pines, and away dashed Jake after them. Not being accustomed to the little vagaries of American bird-dogs, I ordered Jake to "'ware chase," but in language more forcible than polite my companion requested me to hold my peace, and follow him, as the dog had simply gone to "tree" the birds. Shortly after Jake was heard giving tongue in the distance, and, pressing through the brushwood as quickly as possible towards the spot whence the sound proceeded, we found the dog sitting at the foot of a big spruce-fir, yapping for all he was worth.

"There are the pheasants," said G——, as he pointed towards the dense foliage of the topmost branches of the giant spruce; but, alas, I could see no birds, or, indeed, anything bearing the slightest resemblance to a bird. "Stand clear of the tree, friend, and I'll hustle one of them out for you." I stood clear, and, as the report of the Canadian's gun rang out, a heavy ruffed grouse toppled from the bough upon which it had perched, and came bouncing from branch to branch until, with a thud, it fell to the ground. The remaining bird flew clean over my head, and with a snapshot I managed to cut it down as it flashed through the dark foliage of a strip of hemlocks. During the next beat, of an hour's duration, through many acres of knee-high partridge and whortleberry bushes, but one brace of ruffed

grouse and a jack-rabbit (*Lepus americanus*) were added to the bag. A move was then made towards a cedar swamp, which G—— said was a favoured haunt of the little red American woodcock. The boggy soil of the swamp was in parts simply honeycombed with bore-holes, and I therefore began to think we were in for a good thing. For some little time, however, not a bird was flushed; but, while skirting a spongy, alder-fringed "wet," the dog sprang a leash of 'cock within easy shot of G—— and myself, and a couple were accounted for.

The swamp was, without doubt, a favourite feeding ground of the "long-bills," and we had not proceeded thirty yards from the spot where the first couple were shot, than a single bird got up from the oozy surroundings of a trickling spring close to my feet, and right well did I *miss* him. The report of my gun flushed yet another 'cock close by G——, who very promptly brought it down.

Thus did the Canadian and myself wander in and out among the open spaces of the cedar swamp, picking up a woodcock here, and a hare there, until tiffin-hour arrived, when the bag amounted to three brace of ruffed grouse, a leash of hares, five and a half couple of woodcock, and last, but not least, the porcupine mentioned earlier herein.

Our simple luncheon of salt pork, bread and cheese, and excellent old, home-pressed cider was eaten under the widespreading boughs of a huge sugar-maple, and, having smoked out our corn-cob pines of "black-jack," we again started off in pursuit of the grouse. It would

be dull work for the reader, however, were I to tell of the manner in which this grouse was killed, how that woodcock missed—how they rose or how they fell. But plenty of game was met with, and the sport enjoyed amongst the feather and fur of the forest by my Canadian friend and myself on that delightful Indian summer afternoon was all that could be desired.

UNDER THE MOON

ONE of the most fascinating forms of wildfowling afloat is that of punt-gunning by moonlight. Nature is then in her quietest mood, the plaintive calling of the fowl, the lapping of the tide against the "big-gunner's" low-sided craft, the muffled thunder of the combers breaking upon the treacherous sand-bar and against the bold headland which looms high and gaunt amidst the grey moonlit tide, awaken the slumbering echoes of the vast expanse of ooze-flats, saltings, and dyke-intersected meal marshes. Scarcely a glimmer is there to be seen ashore; the old-time crooked, cobble-paved fishing hamlet and its toil-weary, brine-tanned inhabitants are wrapped in slumber. Out on the main, however, there are more evidences of life than may be seen ashore, and the cluster of lights that dance upon the waves like so many will-o'-the-wisps are the lights of the drifting fishing-fleet, while the dazzling flashes which appear at frequent intervals from beyond

the sand-bar are cast by the powerful reflectors of the pile-lighthouse, which, under the moonbeams, looks for all the world like a huge straddle-legged spider vainly endeavouring to escape the incoming tide. From high overhead the "music" of a skein of grey-lags (the progenitors of the domestic goose) returning to the tide from their nocturnal feeding grounds inland is heard; the curlew pipes his weird, far-reaching cry as he skims over the ooze-flats; the "cackling" of mallard, or the shrill "whe-oh" of a widgeon proclaim that worthier fowl are also a-wing, and the calls of innumerable flocks of plover, knots, dunlin, and many other kinds of waders, sound harmoniously enough in comparison with the shriek of that restless pest of the wildfowler—that feather "hooligan" of the marsh and ooze-flats, the redshank.

To one whose life is, from choice or necessity, spent amongst "bricks and mortar," or who loves not queen Nature and her wild creatures, a moonlight night, or morning, spent in a gunning-punt under similar conditions, and amidst such surroundings as in a simple way I have endeavoured to depict herein, would doubtless prove dreary and monotonous enough. On the other hand, the music of the wind and the waves is far sweeter to the ear of the naturalist-gunner than the grandest nocturne ever composed by the great master Chopin. The call of every species of British duck and wader is as familiar to him as his own voice, and the grotesque forms assumed by the growths of glasswort, sea lavender, and other kinds of salinaceous plants,

under the pale beams of the moon are as welcome to his eyes as the faces of old friends.

There is but very little use in setting out after wild-fowl until an hour or so (according to distance at which the grounds lie and state of tide) before dawn. Earlier in the morning those of the fowl that have not flown inland on the evening flight will distribute themselves over the feeding grounds in such open order that a shot from a swivel gun into a pack of widgeon or duck would not account for more than one, or perchance a couple of birds. The tide should be at half-ebb, and the moon bright, but if full, or nearly so, the luminary is none the worse, from the fowler's point of view, for being a little cloud-flecked. The tyro big-gunner should bear in mind the fact that he must always keep the head of his punt pointing directly towards the moon when on the look-out for fowl at night. If he attempts to "set" to birds with the moon behind him they will sight him long enough before he is within shot of them.

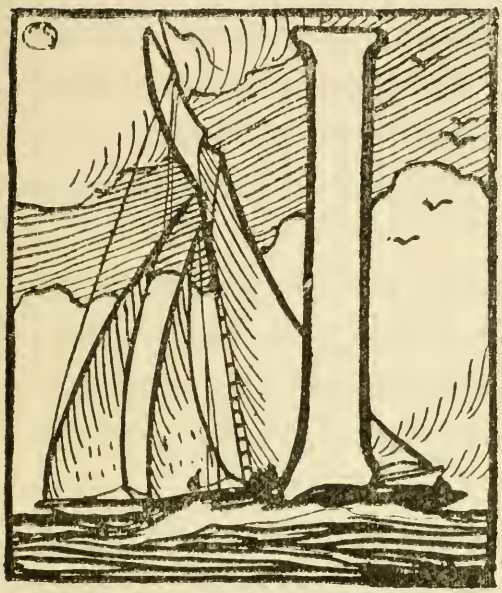
He may hear fowl calling or feeding all round, but never a one will he catch a glimpse of, unless they happen to be within the moonbeams. When driven off the out-lying feeding grounds by the flood tide, the birds will begin to pack together on the uncovered banks lying inshore. It is now that we should try a "set" to them, keeping the moon ever on our bow, or if she be not in evidence, we must perforce wait for the advent of dawn. Some really pretty sport may at times be obtained among the saltings and ooze-spits of the small tidal rivers or

creeks debouching upon the seashore. Early morning is the best time to visit these serpentine, saltwort-fringed waterways, and by quietly drifting in at about half-flood the chances are we may fall in with a paddling of mallard, or a small company of widgeon or teal ; indeed, fowl of all kinds frequently shelter in these peaceful havens during a hard gale, and the harder it blows the better for the " gully-crawler." Some rare specimens are often picked up amongst the creeks and salt-marshes, and although shots with the swivel gun will probably be very few and far between, a heavy shoulder gun should be carried in the punt, as well as the cripple-stopper, for even though there be no duck in evidence, waders of some kind are pretty sure to be met with.

When the wind is blowing hard outside, the puntsman should " hug " the sheltered side of the creek as closely as possible, and be ever on the *qui vive*, for at any moment a curlew, plover or duck may spring from one of the muddy rills which intersect and drain the salt-marshes, and any little sheltered bay in the salts may hold a paddling of mallard. Then again a lively twenty minutes or so of flight-shooting often falls to the share of the creek-shooter as the fowl pass to or from their nightly feeding grounds on the uplands. The flight-shooter must, however, learn the usual line taken by the birds during the morning and evening flight, and, having done so, he should run his punt into some gully lying under the line of flight, and of sufficient depth to hide every portion of his anatomy, and wait patiently for the advent of the

fowl. The flight-shooter must, of course, hide up before dusk or dawn, as the case may be. He should, however, be careful not to land on saltings over which the owner of the adjacent marshes holds manorial rights. Indeed, a wildfowler should always ascertain whether the foreshores and salt-marshes in the neighbourhood in which he may be sojourning are " Crown " or " manorial."

A TALE OF A MIXED BAG



IT was by a mere accident that I discovered the big fleet on E—— Marshes was inhabited by pike, my knowledge of the fact being gained thus. While beating the reed beds which fringed the fleet in question for duck, my retriever flushed a snipe, which I dropped with a "wing down" into the middle of the narrow lagoon. The long-bill, with the dog swimming close in its wake, made a brave struggle to reach the farther shore; but the swirl of a heavy fish of some kind suddenly broke the surface of the water, and next moment the bird was drawn into the turbid depths.

I should probably have attributed this sudden and unexpected disappearance of the snipe to the onslaught of one of the large eels which I knew simply swarmed in the fleets and dykes of E—— Marsh had not the young marshman who accompanied me as henchman, declared the finny marauder to be "a masterful gert ode jack-fish."

I subsequently learned from the marsh bailiff that the fleet was reputed to hold some very large pike; this determined me to have a day with them. I therefore despatched a note to the vicar of the parish, who was a good all-round sportsman, inviting him to fish with me the next morning, and, as I had neither rods nor tackle with me, I begged my reverend friend to bring a couple of jack rods and spinning, or, failing that, the best pike tackle he had.

On the stroke of nine o'clock A.M. the good vicar rode up to the quaint Georgian homestead, which formed my headquarters, on a sturdy Welsh cob, carrying a couple of rods carbine fashion and a goodly-sized creel slung over his shoulders.

"I haven't wetted a line for two years or so, and I am afraid we shall find my old tackle more or less rotten and in a woeful tangle," said H——, after getting the first—and, in my humble opinion, the best—pipe of the day under way.

The parson's angling equipment certainly was in a woeful state of tangle, so much so, indeed, that a good thirty minutes of precious time were wasted in unravelling it. At length, however, a couple of huge "spoons" fitted with trangular hooks, almost large enough to have held a shark, were freed from the confusion of gimp, gut, feathers and steel. These formidable lures having been burnished with a mixture composed of cigar ash and paraffin, off we started across the marshes, which were lightly silvered with the rime of the

preceding night, while the easterly breeze that came in from the North Sea had a decided nip about it.

Tommy, the bailiff's ten-year-old son, accompanied us, the youngster having begged hard to be allowed to play the part of gillie. Our youthful guide piloted us across a series of narrow and particularly slippery planks, spanning the dykes which intersect and drain the marshes, until we arrived at a part of the fleet almost devoid of reeds. We now asked Tommy, who, by the way, was a very bright little chap, whether the fleet held any other kinds of fish beyond pike and eels. "No, maisters," replied he, "but there used to be a wonderful lot o' ode red fins [probably roach or rudd] and Proosian carpses until two or three year ago, when a lot of Lunnun blokes come down and netted every diddy one on 'em very nigh."

Having put the rods and tackle together we commenced operations, the parson electing to work towards the head of the fleet, while I fished the remaining stretch of water.

Although considerably more than a mile in length, the fleet is in no part of greater breadth than sixty yards, and I do not believe that the water was six feet deep in any part.

Though somewhat overgrown with plantains and other aquatic plants, there were plenty of open spaces on the fleet for spinning. At my very first cast into the centre of the water the spoon was seized almost before it had sunk below the surface, and from the manner in which the line ran out I knew that I was into a fairly

heavy fish. It proved but a short and merry run, however, and a few minutes later I reeled into the shore, like a log, the most hideous specimen of a pike imaginable. Very dark in colour, and possessed of a huge head armed with formidable teeth, the body of the fish more resembled that of a large eel than anything else, so emaciated was it. Had the "brute" been in anything like condition I believe it would have scaled at least 20 lb., whereas, when placed in the housewife's balance at the homestead a few hours after capture, it weighed barely 14 lb. Indeed, the bailiff's son did not err in stating that it was "the skinniest and most terriable-looking ode varmint of a jack-fish as ever swummed."

The next cast saw me "hung up" amongst a bed of submerged weeds of a particularly tough and tenacious nature, and, while struggling to get my spoon free, a loud shout from the parson, who was fishing some 500 yards farther along the fleet, caused me to look in his direction, when I saw that he was playing what appeared to be a heavy fish, for his rod was bent almost double. Laying my own rod on the bank, I snatched up the gaff-hook, which I had fashioned out of an old bicycle spoke the preceding night, and ran to my friend's assistance.

"I have a big fellow on, I believe," said H——, "but he's got no more fight in him than a minnow, and has been sulking on the bottom for the last five minutes, and refuses to budge an inch." Scarcely were the words uttered than a heavy swirl appeared on the surface of

the water, and with a rush that seemed to belie the good padre's statement away went Master Pike bang into a dense growth of water-plantains, and it became a case of "pull parson, pull pike." It was a one-sided battle, however, for both the parson and his tackle were strong, the pike sluggish—as is often the case with fish inhabiting stagnant water—and a few minutes later a rather handsomely marked, but miserably lean, thirteen-pounder lay at his last gasp on the sloping shore of the fleet. And now, having gaffed the parson's fish, I will hark back to my own spoon, which still lies hard and fast among the weeds.

The harder I pulled the more hopelessly entangled became my artificial bait, until a somewhat savage tug snapped the line just above the swivel. My "day's" pike-fishing was finished, for the vicar's creel contained no more "spoons," or indeed spinning tackle of any kind, and being a very indifferent swimmer I did not care to venture amongst the clinging weeds on the off chance of finding the lost lure.

I was winding in the slack line when Tommy, who had wandered off on his own account while I was helping the parson land his pike, came up to me at a jog-trot with the news that a couple of old shovel-bills (shoveller duck) had dropped in a runnel on the saltings lying outside the high sea-walls, which had been erected round the marsh during the reign of William of Orange, to stop the inroads of the tide.

Now a shot at shoveller duck does not fall to the lot

of a gunner very frequently, and having sent Tommy speeding across the marshes to the homestead for my 12-bore and cartridge bag, I walked over to H——, and invited him to try and get a shot at the shovellers; provided, of course, they remained on the salts until the boy returned with the gun. But H—— would not hear of this, notwithstanding that he is a very much better shot than myself, and a keen wildfowler to boot.

When Tommy returned, he pointed out a boundary gate, standing on the top of the sea-wall, with the remark, "The drain where they ode shovel-bills dropped runs within a rod o' that theer gate."

Putting a couple of cartridges loaded with No. 5's into the chambers of my gun, I started on a bee-line across an extensive lucerne marsh towards the gate in question, which stood about a quarter of a mile distant from the fleet.

At length, after crossing one other dyke, I arrived at the base of the sea-wall, and, noiselessly climbing up the grassy side of the same on "all fours," I gained the top without having heard the warning note of alarm shoveller duck almost invariably give upon being disturbed into taking wing.

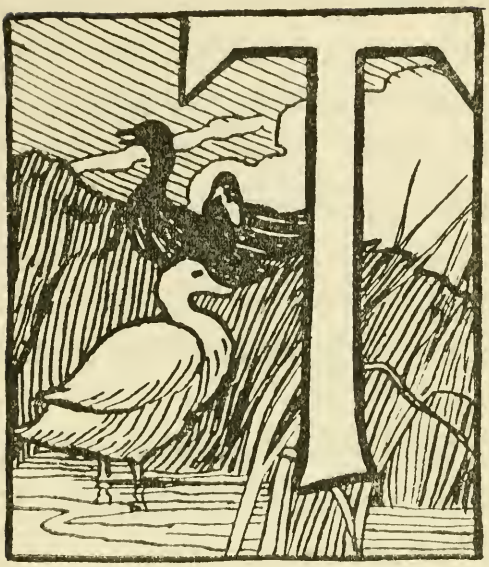
Pushing the barrels of my gun through the long, rank grass growing on the crown of the escarpment, and keeping my head well screened behind this rough cover, I scanned every muddy rill and gully within view. But no sign of anything in the shape of fowl was there to be seen. Suddenly, however, up got the duck I was in

search of from a small gut running parallel with the sea-wall, and so hidden amidst saltwort that it had escaped my notice. The shovellers rose well within shot of me, and although I missed clean with my first barrel, I managed to drop the drake with my second. The female, as though loth to leave her consort, wheeled twice over the spot where he lay "paddles" upward, passing within easy range of me. Any chance I might have had of killing her was spoiled through the bulging of an empty cartridge-case, and my gun being a non-ejector, the duck had disappeared from my sight for ever ere I succeeded—by the aid of a button-hook—in extracting the faulty case.

Gathering the dead bird from the slimy little pan of water into which it had fallen, I returned to the fleet, to find the vicar taking his rod to pieces.

"Sufficient for the day," quoth the reverend angler, as he pointed to a long row of the ugliest and most hungry-looking pike it had ever been my sorrow to look upon.

THE LAST SHOT OF THE SEASON



THOUGH the morning is still "pitch" dark old Gilson, professional wildfowler and ex-smuggler, picks his way down the narrow, crooked street of his native fishing village, his heavy iron-studded sea-boots creating a great clatter on the cobble-stones with which the old-time footway is paved. The riding-lights of weather-bound vessels anchored in the fairway dance merrily this morning, and the thunder of the North Sea combers breaking upon the treacherous sand-bar is so heavy that the old gunner mutters audibly: "It 'on't do to wenture outside the creeks in the gunnin'-punt this marnin'," as he walks along the ancient stone jetty which acts the threefold purpose of a *rendezvous* for the local gossips; a wharf for the landing of goods from coasting vessels and fishing smacks, and, in stormy weather, a breakwater against which the "white horses" dash and leap when driven hard by the fury of the wild nor'-easter. A spark that wanes and waxes,—though not of

much more importance than the phosphorescent light shed by a glowworm in a hedgerow,—and the pungent odour of a Trichinopli cheroot tell of the presence of a second man on the jetty,—a man with a strong stomach and a "thick" head, for who would venture to tackle a well-seasoned "Trichy" before six o'clock in the morning, unless he were endowed with both these physical advantages and the courage of a Spartan to boot?

A cheery "Good-morning, Gilson; you're a wee bit late I fancy," from the smoker elicits a somewhat gruff reply of "No, I b'ain't; yew be y'arly, and for God's sake do 'ee chuck away that theer flame-fetchin', bird-scarin' cigar o' yourn, Maister Dick. Never yet did I meet with a big-gunner worth his grog as pulled a whiff arter he'd set foot aboard his punt." Dick M—, the rector's son—than whom not a keener fowler exists between the Blackwater estuary and the Wash—flings the offending cheroot into the tide, and lends a willing and powerful hand to his humble friend and fowling instructor towards rigging the antiquated $1\frac{1}{2}$-in. bore muzzle-loading stanchion gun, and getting the necessary equipment aboard the double-handed gunning-punt. The wind blows from off shore, and, as old puntsmen and sailormen generally have it, is therefore a "soger's breeze," to R— river, which tidal waterway, by-the-by, is to form old Gilson's fowling ground this morning. A broomstick of a mast carrying a handkerchief-like lugsail is "stepped" and "stayed" just forward of the well-coaming, and upon the punt gradually drawing away

from the leeside of the jetty the " rag of calico " begins to fill and belly, and there being some weight in the northerly breeze the tiny ship shows quite a good turn of speed down the narrow, tortuous gully which will carry her almost into the mouth of the river.

Despite the sinuosities of the creek, Gilson steers his shallow, silent craft past every tongue and spit of ooze with unerring skill; no easy matter, this, for the wind being dead aft and fresh, the smallest mistake on the part of the helmsman might end in a gybe and possibly a capsize, a gunning-punt being a ticklish craft when under sail. At length, after some thirty minutes of rapid sailing, a beacon marking the entrance to R— river is made. The sail is now lowered, the mast unstepped, and both are stowed under the side deck. " Theer should be a tidy lot o' fowl a-shelterin' in the crick after yesterday's snow-tempest, Maister Dick; so do 'ee keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, and don't 'ee touch the trigger-string till I give the word," remarks the old gunner, somewhat pointedly, to his disciple, knowing only too well that youthful sportsmen are very apt to forget that wildfowl are endowed by Nature with exceptionally quick hearing, while every big-gunner's fingers, be he old or young, itch to " pull " into a company of fowl long enough before the proper moment arrives.

Having delivered his oration, Gilson takes the setting-stick and begins to pole the punt over the shoals and towards the mouth of the creek, which, in the uncertain light of early morning, looks like a wide breach in the

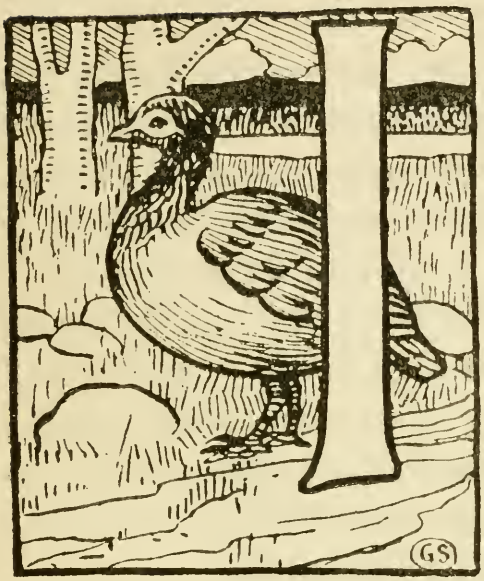
high marsh-dykes. A curlew, less wary than the majority of its species, rises within easy range of the cripple-stopper from a high bank of ooze which the incoming tide has not yet covered, and, uttering shrill and far-reaching cries of alarm, the long-billed bird speeds to the neighbouring marshes, much to the disgust of Gilson, who mutters something to the effect that his companion is too slow "for a burying party, or he'd a-knocked that screechin' ode varmint of a curloo down with the shoulder gun like a robin."

By this time it is sufficiently light to enable the gunners to discern a small flock of grey plover assembled on a tongue of slob on the opposite side of the creek. But not a sign is there to be seen of the pochards. At length, however, a number of dark forms are dimly observed huddled together on the edge of a long, narrow ooze-flat, situated about the eighth of a mile higher up the river, and a laconic, "Theer they be," from old Gilson, puts the youngster behind the swivel gun more than ever on the alert.

Foot by foot and fathom by fathom creeps the low, grey craft towards the duck until they are almost within range of the big gun rigged in her bows. Still, they do not appear to heed the danger that lurks so near at hand. But the clever old puntsman takes advantage of every available bit of cover afforded by the intervening spits of ooze and saltings, and as he sets to his fowl almost dead-up wind they are unable to scent him. Suddenly up goes the head of the nearest sentinel and

the next moment the whole company—numbering perhaps 300 head of mallard, pochard, and widgeon—rise in a bunch. The wings of the fowl have barely cleared the mud than twenty-four ounces of lead are sent into the "brown" of them, and when the smoke of the heavy charge of black powder clears away three mallard, two dunbirds, and seven widgeon are seen lying motionless on the mud, while several lively cripples are doing their level best to waddle down to the tide. But old Gilson sends the punt hissing through the water towards the wounded birds, which are soon put *hors de combat* with the "cripple-stopper." The slain are now gathered and stowed aboard, and Gaffer Gilson and his pupil toast "The last shot of the season" in a thimbleful of something good and comforting.

A GUINEA-FOWL DRIVE



IT was the New-Year's morning of 1906 when our party of fourteen guns started from good old Jan Vandevord's quaint Natalian homestead for a day's covert shooting in the sweetly scented wattle and eucalyptus plantations which clothed the neighbouring hills, within the borders of Oom Jan's extensive property.

The first covert was a mere strip of spinney in comparison with the larger plantations, some of which covered an area of at least 200 acres. The narrow wood yielded a few hares. The beaters declared they set afoot a couple of steinbok during the beat, but the little antelope must have broken covert without being viewed away by any of the guns posted outside. In any case, no one admitted having seen or shot at anything more important than a hare.

The beating of the second covert was a very different matter from that of the first, it being quite a forest in comparison. For the convenience of transporting

timber, rides of from 30 to 40 feet wide had been cut at intervals from end to end and across the covert, and in these rides the guns were posted some 80 yards apart. The undercover was in some parts very dense, and in others sparse and open.

For a time nothing but the rustle of the foliage was heard in the plantation, and then an ear-splitting holloa from Oom Jan gave the signal for the beaters to advance. The distant yells of the natives gradually increased in volume, until the covert seemed to be peopled by a whole legion of demons, while doves came screwing through the tree-trunks, and over the dark, shade-giving foliage in hundreds. The small South African dove, however, is scarcely worth a cartridge, and though often offering very sporting and difficult shots, they were allowed to go on their way unscathed.

After the first big flight of doves, hares began to make their appearance, some quietly loping through the undergrowth, and others tearing along or across the rides at such speed that a charge of shot sent them somersaulting like so many well-shot rabbits.

Next, a sudden rustling amongst the dense under-covert caused me to face to the right, when I saw a steinbok standing still, as though undecided whether to break back or advance, within twenty yards of my stand.

It was with a feeling akin to shame that I "mowed down" the beautiful little antelope with the contents of my left barrel (No. 3 "chilled"); for it seemed to

savour somewhat of butchery. But a buck is the *rara avis* of these drives, and is just as eagerly looked for as a woodcock in a covert shoot at home. It may be argued that antelope, big or little, should be shot with the rifle only. This is true where the open veldt is concerned; but in covert, with beaters working up to the guns, the indiscriminate firing of bullets would be highly dangerous; and then, are not roe deer often laid low by a charge of shot in English and Scottish coverts? Be this as it may, I confess to killing that unfortunate steinbok with No. 3 "chilled"; and several others of his kind, together with three duiker, were shot in a similar manner during the day's sport.

But to return to my stand. As the noisy rabble of ebon beaters approached nearer, droves of hares (*Lepus capensis*) came scuttling through the trees and undercovert, and the firing became general, and almost incessant. Beyond a few pheasants, however, which our host had turned down as an experiment, and which we were requested not to shoot, feathered game was conspicuous by its absence; and this being my first day's covert shooting in South Africa, I began to wonder what had become of the great numbers of guinea-fowl which Oom Jan had promised to show us.

The tattered mob of beaters—the more tattered from their march through the undercover—bleeding from a hundred scratches, but happy, now began to make their appearance, not in line, according to orders, but in little bunches of three and four, chattering and gesticu-

lating like so many great baboons. The roll being called, and only two of the Kaffirs found missing (a mere detail), the guns formed in groups under the shade of the odorous forest-trees while the natives gathered the slain.

"We shall get among the guinea-fowl next beat, and some of you will have hot barrels to your guns, I'll warrant," quoth Jan Vandevord, between the great puffs of rank Boer tobacco smoke which he blew from hirsute mouth and nostrils, tainting the air with an aroma like that of burning rags for yards around. Ninety and odd hares (there ought to have been double that number), and three steinbok, were gathered as the result of the drive, and the game having been covered with leafy boughs of pungent eucalyptus as a precaution against the ravages of *aasvogels* (Egyptian vultures) and other marauders, winged and furred, preparations for the next beat were made.

Our host, anxious to show his *rooinek* guests good sport, placed the guns round the sides and end of the remaining belt of covert, which was much more narrow than before, and then returned to *baas* the beaters, and see that they worked in some sort of order. The wary guinea-fowl can, probably, give any other species of feathered game under the sun points in both cunning and running, and, unless driven systematically, ninety out of every hundred guinea-fowl found in covert will break back, or otherwise escape both guns and beaters.

There was not nearly so much noise among the Kaffirs during the second beat of the big plantation.

This was doubtless due to the pacificatory influence of Oom Jan and his redoubtable *sjambok*, and presently the covert was ringing with a loud chorus of "Come back, come back, come back"—"music" that put every man armed with a gun on the alert.

A "pop-popping" of 12-bores now began. It was only a second exodus of the leporine tribe, however, and my cartridge magazine not being too well furnished, I let the majority of the hares which passed me go away unharmed.

The strange calls of the guinea-fowl came nearer and nearer, and as I stood facing the plantation my attention was suddenly attracted by a number of speckled forms sneaking through a patch of scanty undergrowth. They were guinea-fowl, and, immediately upon sighting me, the wary birds skedaddled back into covert, where they remained hidden until the beaters put them up. Then, with a great to-do, they came past me at a pace that would not have disgraced driven grouse, affording beautiful crossing shots. To my disgust, however, I missed clean with my right, and only succeeded in dropping an old hen with my second barrel. Then, in twos and threes and in small packs, the speckled fowl flashed out of covert, offering in many cases the most sporting shots imaginable, while from the interior of the plantation an incessant "Come back, come back" told its own tale of birds having escaped the beaters.

Jan Vandevord did not err in stating that some of our gun barrels would get hot during the drive. Indeed,

so heated did my own gun become, that I was glad to wind a handkerchief round my left hand. Nevertheless I am bound to confess that the number of empty cartridge cases which lay strewn round my stand, after the fusillade was over, greatly exceeded the sum total of my bag. In short, I very soon learned that a guinea-fowl, when fairly on the wing, takes quite as much stopping as a "tall" pheasant.

Two more beats of the covert were made, and a goodly bag of guinea-fowl, together with several steinbok and duiker, shot. But one beat was very much like another, and as I did not shoot by any means brilliantly in either, I will cry, "*Non mi ricordi.*"

A MIXED BAG IN THE ORANGE RIVER COLONY

"THE sun has risen, baas," cried my Zulu servant, Mamba, as he passed a steaming cup of coffee through the fly of my tent, which was pitched in a picturesque spot at the foot of a rugged boulder-strewn kopje, a long day's trek south-east of Bloemfontein.

"All right, Mamba, go and awaken Baas de V——, and prepare breakfast as quickly as possible," was my reply to the native, who, by-the-by, was an excellent camp cook, and when away from civilisation and *dop* (Cape brandy) a good all-round servant enough.

In spite of a decided twinge of frost in the air, the morning was glorious, and as I left my canvas shelter to take a dip in the neighbouring spruit, the first bright spears of the sun were beginning to appear above the summits of a distant chain of chocolate-brown hills. To the eyes of one fresh from the rural beauties of the old country the scene which lay before me on that bright African morning would doubtless have appeared dreary

and desolate-looking enough. To north, south, east and west rolled away mile after mile of perfectly level plain, a low range of kopjes, a patch of bush, a few stunted acacia and wait-a-bit trees, and a small pan of reed-fringed water, these being the only objects to break the wearying monotony of the scene. High overhead were to be seen a few dark specks wheeling in graceful gyrations in the cloudless heavens. They were *aasvogels* (Egyptian vultures), those loathsome but useful scavengers of the veldt which are ever on the *qui vive* for dying things and carrion. The great birds' roosting-place was on a spur of the kopje that towered above our camping-place. As I was throwing off my pyjamas preparatory to taking a splash in the cool water of the spruit, a painted snipe rose within a yard of me, and away up the creek he flew, uttering his strange call of alarm. Greatly refreshed by my improvised "tub," I returned to the outspan, to find de V—— haranguing the half-dozen or so Kaffirs, who accompanied our little expedition, regarding the manner in which they were to beat for us. After a somewhat frugal breakfast the guns were taken from the waggon, and away we started to wage war against anything wearing feather or fur worthy a cartridge. "We had better work towards the pan," said de V——, as he put a couple of No. 5 shot cartridges into the chambers of his 12-bore, adding, "Will you take the spruit or shall I?" Now, having flushed the painted snipe from the little waterway in question during my matutinal ablutions, and making a shrewd guess that I

should meet with more of those beautiful members of the *Rostratula* family, or with, perhaps, a full snipe, avocet, or greenshank, I agreed readily enough to take the beat along the spruit. As a long and broad strip of the veldt on the farther side of it had been recently fired, and there being not sufficient cover left to harbour a mouse on the blackened patch, de V—— and the beaters remained on the right-hand side of the rivulet, the former walking in the centre of the line at about 100 yards distant from myself. In parts the rough veldt grass —if grass it could be called—was waist high, with patches of sage bush and other coarse herbage interspersed. I had not proceeded far on my beat when a Basuto on my right cried, "*Pas oop, baas*," and the next moment a leash of francolin rose with a great to-do between the native and myself. The birds passed me left-handed at not more than 25 yards' range, affording an absurdly easy right and left. Holding, as I thought, well in front of the leading bird, I pulled, but to my disgust he went away as though he liked it, and I only succeeded in winging a young cock in immature plumage, which led my henchman a merry dance across the scorching veldt ere he allowed himself to be captured. The remaining brace flew on and on until lost to view behind a belt of wait-a-bit thorns. For some little time after the passing of the francolin nothing was moved beyond an ugly old hammer-kop, which, carrying a small water-lizard between its mandibles, flew away unshot at. Suddenly, however, the double report of de V——'s gun reached

my ears, and looking in the direction whence the shooting proceeded, I saw a small bunch of ringed plover heading towards me. Unfortunately a yell from one of the beaters caused the birds to turn off sharply to the right while yet a good 80 yards away from me. Muttering a "blessing" upon the head of the Kaffir who spoiled my chance at the birds, I again started forward, while de V——, with a broad grin overspreading his freckled countenance, held up a couple of plover for my edification. I very soon had my revenge, however, for a few minutes later, when rounding a bend of the spruit, a spring of between twenty and thirty pink-bill teal rose in a "heap" within 12 yards of me. Aiming into the thick of them, I pulled, and a leash dropped like so many stones into the turbid water, while with my second I stopped a fourth of the little duck, which, after carrying on for a short distance across the veldt, pitched head foremost into an antbear earth, to be gathered by my bearer. Nothing further, with the exception of a small hare (*Lepus capensis*) shot by de V—— as he was walking through a patch of dry rushes, was got during the remainder of the beat to the pan, and as we noticed several paddlings of grey duck and pink-bill teal, together with a big colony of coots resting on the water, we halted to arrange a drive of the same. Having drummed into the thick, woolly pates of our followers the manner in which they were to drive to us when we had taken up our stands in a belt of tall reeds growing at the farther end of the lagoon, de V—— and myself made a detour over

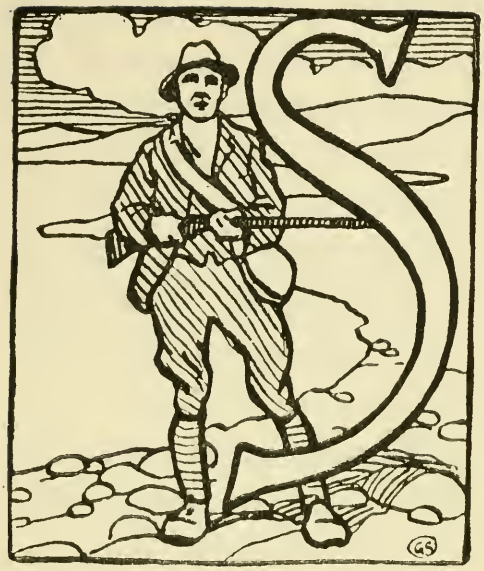
the veldt until the growth of reeds in question was reached. Then, having divested ourselves of nether garments and boots, we commenced to wade through tepid, knee-deep slime and water, disturbing sundry huge and hideous barbars, or mud-fish, as we went, now sinking up to our waists in a hole, and now floundering through a deep deposit of foully-smelling vegetable matter, the accumulation of ages. I took up my stand in a clump of wild rice, from which a fairly clear view of the lagoon was obtainable, while my companion squelched on to the next growth of reed cover, which lay some 80 yards to my right. At length de V—— also reached his goal, and the signal—a shrill, long-drawn whistle—was given for the natives to move forward. "The first boy who shouts during the drive shall have a good *sjamboking* when the day's work is over," had been de V——'s last words to the beaters as we left them. But it would be a strange Kaffir who could keep his blubber lips closed when engaged in anything appertaining to sport, and, yelling and whooping like so many demons incarnate, our little band of ebon beaters plunged into the muddy water in more or less open order. In a moment every head of fowl on the pan—with the exception of the cunning old coots, which crept into every available bit of cover the moment they "twigged" the enemy — was a-wing, among them a small gaggle of spur-wing geese and a big flock of sacred ibises, the latter appearing for all the world like a herd of great black-and-white curlews. Almost before I had

time to realise what had happened, the spur-wings came stringing over my stand with a great to-do. Again, to my chagrin, I failed to score with my first barrel, although half a handful of feathers were cut from the back of the bird I had singled out for my own. My second attempt proved more successful, however, and with a heavy splash a fine old gander fell dead almost at my feet. The gaggle now turned off right-handed, and as they passed well within shot of de V—— I saw a couple of their number fall almost simultaneously to the double report of his 12-bore. A bunch of some twenty duck next swung past me at a great pace, but well out of range. The "snap-snap" of the nitro in my friend's gun reached me every now and again as he fired at passing fowl; but I had no time to watch what sort of practice he was making, as small bunches of teal and duck and coots, in twos and threes and dozens, kept me pretty busily engaged. I am bound to confess, however, that my powder was not by any means as straight as it might have been. At length the splashing of the mud-soiled Kaffirs, as they half swam, half waded through the tepid water, was clearly audible, and, peering through the openings of my "blind," I saw the remnant of the colony of coots taking cover in the last clump of reeds; but when the yelling natives entered the dusky fowls' final haven of refuge the birds had no choice but to take wing. Up they got in a black mass, and with the wind behind them they flew between de V—— and myself at a pace that would not have disgraced a pack of driven

grouse. Once more I missed clean with my first, but—probably more by luck than judgment—a couple of the bald pates dropped to the contents of my second barrel. The drive was now over, and the boys were set to work to gather the slain. A goodly number of cripples, doubtless, evaded the not over-vigilant eyes of our human retrievers by hiding among the dense aquatic growth, only to fall a prey to an *aasvogel*, chanting goshawk, or some other feathered marauder of the veldt. Be this as it may, the bag when laid out on the shelving shore of the lagoon made a very decent show, and included francolin, hare, spur-wing geese, duck, coots, snipe and ringed plover.

The remainder of the morning was spent on the veldt, and ere we sat down to tiffin, under the shade-giving spur of our kopje, several more brace of francolin and a beautiful silver korhaan (lesser bustard) had been added to the bag.

SHORE "POPPING"



O remotely situated are my favourite fowling-grounds that the nearest town of any consequence thereto lies a good ten miles distant. True, some half-dozen natives seek to obtain a precarious livelihood in their narrow Lynn-type, single-handed gunning-punts during the winter months; but they are all good fellows enough, and although I have reason to believe that when first I took down my punt and stanchion gun, some fifteen years ago [how quickly the seasons fly by] I was regarded more or less as an interloper, a little diplomacy on my part, meted out with sundry ounces of black shag, canisters of punting-powder, and other little gifts of a like nature, cemented good feeling between these honest, brine-tanned gunners and myself. But to get a bit forrarder on our walk across the salt-marshes, which, by the way, are not manorial rights. Anyone possessing a gun and gun licence is at liberty to shoot over the saltings in question.

From the sea-wall, which had to be crossed before the saltings were reached, a grand, albeit wild and desolate-looking scene lay before me. To south, east, and west rolled away the North Sea, its white-crested waves breaking with a thunder upon the serrated edges of what form, when uncovered by the tide, a vast expanse of ooze-flats and black-grounds, flanked inshore by many hundreds of acres of saltwort and sea-lavender clothed salt-marshes. Looking inland, a perfectly level Dutch-like landscape of dyke and fleet intersected levels stretched away before one's eyes, and, with the exception of the reed-thatched roofs of a sleepy little fishing village, an old-time lichen-walled homestead, standing amidst its barns and hayricks, in the very centre of the marshes, and a few sheep and cattle grazing upon the rich pasture of the same, there was nothing to break the wearying monotony of the scene.

I had scarcely crossed the sea-wall before the report of a heavy shoulder gun reached me from the saltings lying to my left, and looking in the direction whence the sound came I saw a bunch of some ten or twelve mallard flying low and heading apparently straight for me. Dropping on my knees into a patch of bents growing at the base of the sea-wall, I anxiously waited for them. Unfortunately, the duck either sighted or scented me, and swinging round right-handed, while still well out of shot of the 12-bore, they winged their way over the ooze-flats and finally dropped into a small and well-sheltered bay lying about a mile farther along the shore, in which,

by the aid of my binoculars, I saw a company of mixed fowl resting, and also a grey, matchlike object moving across wind slowly but surely towards the apparently unsuspicious birds. One of the local gunners was setting to the fowl in his narrow single-handed punt.

Thinking it not improbable that a stray mallard, teal or widgeon might be harbouring in some of the deep, wind-sheltered runnels which intersected the salt-marshes, I determined to walk across the latter until arriving at an old gunning-pit, wherein I purposed waiting for any birds which might fly within shot after they had been flooded off the banks by the incoming tide.

Pulling my thigh-boots well up I began my trudge, and was in the act of crossing a muddy little gut when I heard the "scape, scape" of a snipe, and turning quickly I saw the "long-bill" screwing up the water-course. That snipe was too quick for me, and before I could get my gun up he had disappeared round a bend of the gut and passed from my sight for ever behind the sea-wall. Then for some little time I met with nothing wearing feathers beyond a small trip of dunlins, which I did not consider worthy a cartridge. As I neared a small tidal creek, however, which was just beginning to fill with water, and which had to be crossed in a rotten old tub of a ferry-boat tied up to a running mooring ere the gunning-pit was reached, I heard the whistling call of a teal, and then, to my delight, I saw some fifty or sixty of those delightful little duck paddling on the edge of the tide some 80 yards higher up the

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creek than the spot I should have struck had I continued on my original beat. My experience regarding teal is that the straighter and quicker they are approached the better chance one has of getting a shot into them.

Making a landmark of a beacon standing on the margin of the creek, and at a point almost opposite the teal, I retraced my footsteps, and then walked directly towards the beacon. Forty-five, 40, and now less than 30 yards of mud lie between the little duck and myself, and yet, in spite of the fact that every bright, keen eye is doubtless turned towards me, not a single bird gets up. Another squelching step forward on my part, however, and up spring the whole bunch like a flight of rockets. So closely packed were the teal that no fewer than five of their number dropped stone-dead to the contents of my first barrel, and a single bird with a wing down to my second. With a great to-do, the rest of the bunch flew like lightning up the creek, but wheeling suddenly, they passed me again just out of range, and then headed seawards. Having dealt with the cripple and gathered the slain, I pulled across the creek in the leaky ferry-boat, and made my way across a second patch of salt-marshes to the before-mentioned gunning-pit, which lay near the mouth of the creek. The pit had evidently not been used for some little time, as it was half filled with rubbish that had been thrown up by the high spring tides. There was no time to lose before getting under cover, for the "flood" was making very rapidly, and many of the outlying banks were already awash. The

baling-out operation with an old tin basin was the work of a very few minutes, and, making myself as comfortable as circumstances allowed, I prepared to receive any fowl that might condescend to pay me a visit. I began to wish that I had brought my favourite old retriever with me, for shore-shooting is but solitary work at the best of times, and waiting up for fowl in a muddy pit is the acme of solitude.

I had not been in my hiding-place many minutes when the boom of a swivel gun re-echoed over the tide. The puntsman mentioned earlier herein had evidently got a shot into the company of fowl assembled in the bay ; but as to whether or no he killed anything I was unable to tell, as a high ridge of sand screened the bay from my sight. Shortly after a " fanning " of wings overhead caused me to look skywards, when I saw a huge flock of green plover passing in a southerly direction, and far out of range. Then came a long wait, without anything of more importance than a small trip of redshanks flying within shot of the pit, and as the banks were all awash by this time, I began to think my sport for that morning at least was finished. The unexpected often happens to the shore-shooter, however, and just as I was putting a No. 10 shot cartridge into my left barrel on the " off-chance " of meeting with a snipe during the return journey, a familiar and welcome " whe-oh " from somewhere close at hand gladdened my ears; and a few moments later a little lot of widgeon came quietly drifting into the creek with the tide. The birds were

within 40 yards of the pit, and, hastily exchanging the snipe cartridge for one containing No. 4's, I pulled at a leash swimming almost wing and wing. A couple turned paddles up instanter, while the third went away apparently untouched. Aiming at the centre teal of the bunch as they rose from the water, I again fired, but an ominous click proclaimed a miss-fire, and away sped the widgeon to the main, while I, having gathered the dead 'uns in the ancient ferry-boat, returned to mine inn, thoroughly satisfied with the morning's sport.

THE BALLYHILLY STEEPLECHASE

IT was a disastrous day to the fair fame of the O'Grady genealogical plant—root, stem and branch—when that worthy scion of it, yclept Denis, lamented the decay of sport and sportsmen in Ballyhilly, as one evening he sat over his pipe and "poteen" in the village inn.

"Arrah!" said he, "what can ye expect of a lot iv tay-dhrinkin' gossoons iv fellows that spends their evenin's shootin' 'marvels'? An' as for throwin' their leg over a horse an' takin' a fence, sure I've seen monkeys in the circus that knows more about it; an' begorra, if ye talked about a steeplechase, they'd stare at ye like a dead hake, and think ye're spakin' iv climbin' the church spire. Sure, ould an' all as I am, be my sowl, it's meself'd give the best man iv them, for ten miles round, a couple iv stone and a batin' over the Punchestown coorse, or three mile an' a half across any counthry he'd like to name."

"Niver yet did I know boastin' man as good as his

word, Denis O'Grady," chimed in a burly young farmer named Daly, for the ears of whom, we might be correct in suggesting, the former intended his remarks, as this same youthful son of the soil took a keen interest in hunters, in the breeding, schooling, and selling of which he was considered equally an adept.

" An' if I haven't good raison for my words," went on Denis, addressing the interlocutor, " 'twould be sarvin ye betther nor puttin' in your tongue to skedaddle home at wanst, an' get your father to tell ye how I was the favourite at the steeplechases at Loughbally before—ay, before he iver dhramed that a spalpeen like you'd step intil his boots."

This latter sally, dramatically delivered by the old chap as he held his dudeen in his left hand, while in his right he flourished his glass, preparatory to a final quaff, was followed by a peal of laughter, in which his interrupter was forced to join.

" Well, Denis," said Daly, " I must inquire ; an' if your ivery word's not thrue, here's my hand, an' I'm the man to keep you till your wager."

" What do ye mane ? " replied O'Grady, looking rather nonplussed, for he had already forgotten the exact terms of his gasconade.

" Why, ye've just sworn ye'd ride three an' a half miles cross-counthry agin any man for ten miles round, an' if ye're the sportsman ye swear ye are, ye won't go back on your word."

" An' bad luck to it," said Denis, " sure the only

thing'd put me back on it's the want iv a mount—unless it be McLoughlin's ould cutty" (donkey). "I tell ye what," he added jovially, "let's settle it wid a pair iv the cobbler's cutties, an' we'll sit facin' the whip-end iv them, an' it'll be for which iv us comes in last."

"Ah, no, Denis," persisted Daly; "it won't do. Ye'll not pull your head out iv the loop in that way wid your blarney. I'll back the Squire to see you mounted, an' he's undher the roof this very minit, talkin' to the landlord."

"The divil he is!" exclaimed O'Grady, who hurried from the taproom to the parlour, where the Squire was chatting to the innkeeper. He was followed by the company, most of whom suspected that he scented an extra bottle of stout; and some there were who had a suspicion that he wished to elude the noose he was drawing around his neck. But the young yeoman was not to be put off, and, with a knowing look, he opened on the Squire as follows:—

"Good-evening, Squire! An' it's Denis here's been boastin' like a Salvation man tellin' his sins, that if he only had a mount, he'd give a couple iv stone an' a batin' over Punchestown steeplechase coorse, or three miles an' a half iv fair huntin' counthry to any man for ten miles around."

"An' be the powers I would, your honour," said Denis boldly, "as fast as I'd dhrink a bottle iv stout if it stood before me this minit."

"Ah! Dublin porter is your favourite tipple, I

believe," was the Squire's response to this double-edge, yet all too easily comprehended, thrust.

"There's none to bate it," replied Denis, with a pleased look of expectation beaming on his face, which betrayed happy anticipations in the very near future; but his expression changed to that of a Gallio-like listener, and he shifted uneasily from one leg to the other, as the Squire passed on to reply to the subject broached by the farmer.

"Well, Denis," said he, "if you really mean to maintain your reputation as a horseman——"

"An' they say it's made out iv the Liffey, your honour; but sure, if it is, it must be the mighty grand wather the Dublin people dhrink," interjected the old hare-hunter, who had evidently never grasped the import of this colloquial teetotal aspersion of his favourite beverage.

"I'll mount you on old Kitty, and you know there's not a better chaser nor lepper for miles round, and——"

"An' sure it's both mate an' kitchen that same porther is, your honour, whatever it's made iv, and——"

"For heaven's sake fill Denis a tumbler of stout, or we shall never get any forrarder with this match," said the Squire to Boniface. "And now let's arrange the preliminaries: I'll give a bacon-pig and a hunting-crop to the winner."

"And, by your honour's leave, I'll throw in a keg of Denis's favourite stout," echoed the host, amidst a murmur of applause from the baker's dozen or so of the rustic audience.

"Sure an' I'd ride through purgatory an' back agin for a keg iv that same iligant stuff," cried O'Grady, as he turned his glass upside down on the table, and to whom, we may remark, the last glass of double X had imported a considerable amount of Dutch courage.

"Bravely said," remarked the Squire, continuing: "The stakes are to be a silver-mounted hunting-crop, a bacon-pig, and a keg of porter; and the course over three and a half miles of fair hunting country, to be chosen and flagged by Mr Despard and myself. O'Grady will ride my old mare, Kitty, and"—with a smile—"Mr Daly will *follow* him on his chestnut gelding, Donovan."

"An' begob it's right your honour is," said Denis; "for sure young Tom Daly'll follow at ould Kitty's heels like a groom, an' niver get any nearer, from start till finish; the impident spalpeen that he is, settin' himself agin the best blood iv the O'Gradys."

"An' if ye hadn't offered to give a couple iv stone, an' a batin' to boot, to any man for ten miles round, it's not meself'd iv thought iv challengin' an ould hand at the game like yourself," said the farmer, with a grin.

"Begorra, if it wasn't that I hated so much dead weight in the saddle, I'd give ye twice as much, an' bate ye hands down. But sure an' it's yourself, Tom Daly, 'll stand a dhrink round to the boys to show there's no ill-feelin' in the matther," answered Denis, pushing his tumbler towards the landlord. To this request, Daly smiled with good-natured compliance.

The programme was there and then arranged for the

following Saturday, and, next day, Denis, accompanied by his boon companion and hare-hunter, Micky McLoughlin, and armed with a wooden lard-pail containing paste and an obsolete white-washing brush, might have been seen visiting gate-posts, trees, barns, the doors and windows of deserted cabins, and other convenient hoardings in the Ballyhilly district, and posting upon them a large placard in flaming red characters, which read as follows :—

A GRAND CHALLENGE STEEPLECHASE will take place on Saturday next, at BLAZEAWAY HILL, BALLYHILLY, between SQUIRE EGAN'S chestnut mare, KITTY (aged), ridden by that well-known and much-respected sportsman, Mr DENIS O'GRADY (aged 59—11 st. 6 lbs.), Huntsman to the Ballyhilly Beagles, etc., and Mr TOM DALY'S black gelding, DONOVAN (aged), ridden by young TOM DALY (aged 23—11 st.).

Starter and Judge, JOHN DESPARD, ESQ.

The course will be over 3½ miles of fair hunting country, for a Silver-mounted Hunting Crop, a Bacon Pig (presented by SQUIRE EGAN), and a Keg of Double X Stout (thrown in by that highly respected friend of all sportsmen, the Landlord of the "Ballyhilly Arms").

MAY THE BEST MAN WIN!

"Sure an' it's the grand readin' intoirely, and it's the fine headpiece ould Pat Cinnamon the cow-docthor's got on his shouldhers!" exclaimed Denis, as he proudly puzzled out the words, "That well-known and much-respected sportsman, Mr Denis O'Grady," from the contents of the first bill, which he had posted somewhat askew on a vacant panel of the local chapel notice-board, adding: "An' sure all the people comin' to the mission th' morrow night'll see that one anyway. It'll go round the counthry like wildfire, for some iv them'll come ten miles to hear that sooty, woolly-headed ministher prachin' about the naygers."

"An' there's a betther boord still at the parish church, big enough for two iv them," said McLoughlin enthusiastically, as he took up the pail to proceed in that direction. He was restrained, however, by his companion, who gave him to understand that the rector was "the very divil agin racin'," and mightn't take it well if they exhibited a bill in the church porch.

It was late that evening when the weary, mud-and-paste-bespattered bill-stickers walked into the tap-room of the village hostelry to refresh themselves after their day's labours; and the church clock was booming out the hour of ten when the worthy pair set out homewards, sailing along like a couple of ships tacking against a stiff head-wind.

The eventful day at length arrived, and Denis and his rival were taken over the course by the Squire and his cousin, Jack Despard, early in the morning, when the

former casually remarked that "he had ridden over stiffer leps barebacked when he was a bit iv a gossoon, no higher than that," (holding his hand about two feet above the ground). Young Egan invited the competitors up to the Hall to toast each other's health in a glass of the "wine of the country." His cousin and Daly led the way, Denis and himself following a few paces behind, discussing the forthcoming match.

"Now, mind," said the Squire to Denis, "the old mare won't stand the spurs, and the slightest touch with them will make her bolt to the deuce with you."

"Sure 'twas the grand pair iv 'props' your father used to wear, wid the threepenny bits for rowls, and maybe your honour'd 'av' them by ye still," replied Denis suggestively. "But sure, there's just one thing more, your honour, that's throublin' me an' makin' me feel onaisy," added O'Grady, as they approached the Hall.

"And what might that be, Denis?"

"Well, ye see, sir, it's not much iv the jockey I'd cut in my week-day sleeve waistcoat and corduroys, and 'twould be the divil's own disgrace to ride ould Kitty in them, an' more by the same token when your father and her used to be the smartest iv them all at covert-side. An' the brats'd come yappin' afther us like a pack iv cur dogs, an' make the ould mare as ugly-tempered as a bag iv weasels."

"You needn't worry on that score," answered Egan. "I think we shall be able to rig you out from my father's

old hunting-kit. But come in and have a drink and we'll see what we can do."

Ten minutes later Denis left the Hall, carrying with him a market-basket, in which were stowed an old pair of bull-finched white cords, a pair of top-boots with the "threepenny" spurs attached, a well-worn hunting-frock, and last, but not least, an antiquated white beaver hat, which he had chosen from a miscellaneous collection of old head-gear. "For sure, your honours," said he, "'tis the grand hat for a sportsman, an' there'll be no mistakin' it, when it lades past the winnin'-post, by any man, woman, or child along the coorse."

It was a proud day for the "best blood of the O'Gradys" when he emerged from his cottage door arrayed in all the glory of the aforementioned outfit, with the exception of the top-boots, which, as Denis tersely expressed it, "were too tight in the foot and too loose in the legs." A pair of coachman's pink-tops were requisitioned, although they were at least a couple of sizes too large in both respects. Nevertheless, they were not without their good points, for, to quote the borrower's own words, "There's divil a fear iv me bein' hung up in the stirrups, for if the mare puts me down I'll shed them as aisy as an ould rat dhrops the skin iv his tail." He might, indeed, have shed the remainder of his apparel with equal ease had not Mrs O'Grady been busy with her needle; and what with sundry tucks, which there was no pretence of hiding, and shifting of buttons, she had managed to give the garments a hold that would

last, at least, for the ride. The picture would not be complete were we to omit the blue bird's-eye stock, fastened jauntily round his neck with a silver horse-shoe brooch, the property of his "better half," which rivalled in size the shoe of a Shetland pony; and the white beaver which, in spite of its heavy ballast of brown paper around the inner band, still lurched heavily to port, but was moored securely aft by a half-inch black-tape hawser, which his loving spouse had salved from the border of an old abandoned petticoat. As Denis made his way through the village he was hailed with lusty cheers from the admiring inhabitants; knots of strangers already congregated in view of the sport, and a troop of ragged-tailed urchins formed a guard of honour until he reached the Hall gates, where they remained, straining their eyes through the iron bars, expectantly awaiting his return. The juvenile admirers were not kept long in suspense before they saw the white beaver bobbing up and down above the clumps of rhododendron-bushes bordering the drive which led to the stables, and a few minutes later old Kitty came see-sawing, crab-fashion, down the springy turf of the avenue, and trying her hardest to get rid of her gallant rider by brushing him against the trunks of the elm-trees. After much ducking and pulling out, during which the beaver came in for more than a fair share of rough usage, Denis at length got the fifteen-year-old skittish chaser into the open. Then, loosening his tongue, he showered "blessings" on the head of the unruly mount.

"Bad scran to ye, for a murdherin' baste," said he; "ye're mighty fond iv scratching your rusty bones agin the trees, but ye don't put me down that way." Replacing his hat, he found that the "fittings" had got lost in the tussle, and, as he cast a glance behind at the strewed fragments of the paper lying along his path he made some caustic remarks about paper-chasing, which were drowned in a further torrent of invective on the poor old mare, as he vainly tried all sorts of ways to array himself comfortably again in the now ear-crushing and blindfolding headgear. At last he drew forth his red bandana, which he folded cushion-like, and placed on the back of his head, and thus wedged on the beaver. Half the handkerchief protruded below the rim, and was a subject of inquisitive scrutiny to many of the bucolic beholders, who were not at all sure but that it formed an integral part of the wonderful hat itself. Well away from her stable, the old mare went quietly enough, and nothing further of note occurred during the half-mile ride to Blazeaway Hill.

The news of the event had indeed "travelled like wildfire," and the top of the hillside, from which a commanding view of the course was obtainable, was thronged with a merry crowd, and many small bets were exchanged, Donovan being favourite, at 20 to 1 on. Knots of people assembled at various points along the course, which was over an easy line of country; the stiffer fences and the fifteen-foot brook, which had to be negotiated by the competitors, forming the chief points

of attraction. An unusual interest was evinced in the match as Denis, in his capacity of huntsman to the Ballyhilly Beagles, was well known in the district, and much curiosity was abroad to know how he would shape in the new *rôle* of steeplechase rider. The respective merits of Donovan and Kitty, both of which had in their day big local reputations as hunters and chasers, also formed the subject of much rustic criticism, which was at length cut short by the appearance of the riders at the starting-point, a tall Lombardy poplar, over which proudly waved a large square of Turkey-red calico which afforded an admirable grand-stand for many of the race-goers. Denis, in his "swell get-up," was the first to canter past the Squire and the small party of ladies and gentlemen whom he had invited to see the fun. "The 'best blood of the O'Gradys' has got a handful in the old mare this morning, for she seems as fresh as a two-year-old," laughingly remarked Despard to his cousin, as the old chestnut went by, pulling almost double. Young Daly, smart in butcher's boots, cords, green frock, and velvet cap, and sitting his big-boned, black Irish hunter like a centaur, quickly followed. A few minutes afterwards, amidst loud hurrahs, tossing up of hats, caps, handkerchiefs, and porter-bottles, the riders were started, and away they went towards the first fence. . . . But the story of the race were best told as the challenger himself recited it that evening in the taproom of the village hostelry to McLoughlin the cobbler, who had been unavoidably absent from the match:

"Sure, 'twas a grand affair entoirely, Micky," said O'Grady to the owner of the "cutties"; "and me blood was up the minit I was on the coorse, and when I heard the crowds cheerin' me, an' felt ould Kitty jiggin' undher me, I could 'av' faced the Grand National."

"Arrah, he had too much dead weight in the saddle, an' that's what bate him," jestingly remarked one of the merry taproom company, harking back to Denis's boast.

"Shut up your ugly face, ye spalpeen, or I'll close it with a wisp of straw!" cried the defeated rider. "An' sure, Micky," he continued, addressing himself to the meek, believing ears of the cobbler, "didn't the ould mare fly off like the very divil the minit the flag dhropped; an', begorra, I give her both whip an' spur at wanst, and she lepped over the first fence wid me before I could get a grip iv the grazy saddle."

"An' there was a yard iv daylight between you an' it as you went over," waggishly interjected another.

"An', begob, if it was as wide as ye open your mouth you'd have good raison to spake, for sure it's like the enthrance iv Mary Maloney's chaney-shop round the corner," retorted Denis, without deigning to turn his head.

"An', man, Micky, she skimmed over that twenty-acre grass field in Martin's like a swallow, and flew the wall into the plough beyant like a greyhound, an' me all as wan as I was in me ould arm-chair at home; an' she showed a clane pair iv heels up a dhry wather-furrow

to Daly's Donovan, that come poundin' an' blowin' along through the dirt like an ould broken-winded thramway-horse."

"Arrah, be aisy, Denis; 'twas Daly laughing at ye ye heard," chimed in one of the "spalpeens."

"An' I saw him crossin' Martin's field," echoed another, "an' he was for all the world like an old red-coated 'pongo'" (monkey) "hangin' on to a runnin' dog. Begob, it was a big circus pad he should 'av' had instead iv a dacent saddle; an' sure the ould white hat was sthramin' behind like a runaway funeral."

"An' it's yourself'd better be afther orderin' your own funeral if ye can't keep your slandherin' tongue from waggin' at your betthers," said Denis to his interrupter.

"Then we come to Martin's boreen wid the double, an' the ould mare dhropped in an' out iv the lane as purty as a tom-cat a-courtin', Micky, an' went sailin' away across the bog corner like ould Bellman runnin' in view."

"An' didn't Patsy Lanigan an' meself see ye turn somersault an' jump into the saddle again like a bare-backed show-rider as the mare went over?" put in another of the tormentors by way of allusion to a "purler" which Denis sustained at the double in question.

"An' it's yerself should be the clown's flunkey, wid the black diamond on your eye, for all the brains ye have when a half-'un iv whisky sets ye ravin' like a slit-

tongued jackdaw. Come over here, Micky, by the fireside, from these impident clattherin' blackguards that know no more about racin' than pigs about pound notes. I'll show ye the draft iv the coorse in the ashes on the hearth, an' explain iverything to ye as clear as daylight," said Denis, who wished to re-ride his steeplechase after his own manner, and was perchance fearful that if he continued his narration within earshot of his not untruthful tormentors, his boon companion, Micky, might begin to entertain feelings of doubt regarding the veracity of his highly coloured and one-sided description of the race.

Having seated himself in the only chair before the fire, he very graciously kicked a small wooden footstool, of about six inches in height, towards the old shoe-doctor, and motioned him to seat himself at the fireside. He then proceeded to rake out the ashes from beneath the wide peat grate, and spreading them over a square yard or so of the hearth, he borrowed Micky's long churchwarden—" for sure his own wasn't long enough "—and commenced to make a sketch of the point-to-point course, marking the different walls and fences thereon with pieces of white paper, while a match stuck here and there represented the flags. The water-jump was denoted by a small stream of stout, which had to be renewed at frequent intervals, as the dry ashes absorbed the liquor, and part of it was evaporated by the heat of the fire.

" An' what might this be, Denis ? " said Micky, pointing to the pigmy river.

"Sure, bad luck to it, that's the thirty-foot brook I'm comin' to tell ye about afther," exclaimed Denis somewhat impatiently, for with the mouthpiece of the borrowed pipe, he was at that moment illustrating how Kitty had negotiated the "double" like "a coortin' tom-cat." "An' ye see, Micky, we left the lane behind, an' came thundherin' across the lucerne bottom like the Dublin express. The bould Kitty flew over the cow-palin's" (post and rail) "all as wan as a rocketin' pheasant. Then we wheeled round to the right—take your big brogue off the coorse, Micky—then we wheeled round to the right, an' hell for leather homewards, an' young Daly whippin' and spurrin' to get on terms wid us. 'Twould 'av' done your heart good, Micky, to see the way the ould mare took over the fences in her sthride, wid niver a peck nor a stumble, an' me sittin' as tight an' grand as it might 'av' been Joe Widger on Wild Man iv Borneo at the Grand National."

"'Twas the grand figure ye cut entoirely wid you arms round her neck like Johnnie Giltpin, the man the curate recited about at the school the other night, an' young Daly splittin' his sides at ye, an' houldin' ould Donovan in to get a good look at ye, when he could 'av' passed ye like the shot iv a gun at any minit," again put in one of the "clattherin' blackguards," who, tired of the game of shove-halfpenny, once more gathered round to draw the old beagler.

"An' it's back ye are again, ye disthressin' set iv ignorant, good-for-nothin' divils. Give them tuppence,

Micky, to go an' get dhrunk on; and God forgive me for mentionin' it, but it's the only way to get a minit's pace from their wicked, labellin' tongues. Be off home to your mothers, ye pack iv rebelly scoundhrels, an' tell them, wid Denis O'Grady's compliments, that ye're a disgrace to their up-bringin'."

"Not till we've seen ye tap the keg iv stout Tom Daly give ye for the fine dive ye made from ould Kitty's back to sarch for eels in the brook."

Denis opened on the enemy with a volley of strange Gaelic oaths, and then made a sudden onslaught with the poker, causing them to beat a hasty retreat from the taproom. He then returned to the fire, and was continuing the graphic account of his exploits, and explaining how, when he was leading by a good quarter of a mile, and was just charging the brook at something over a thousand miles an hour, some murtherin' gallows-bird jumped out from behind a bush with a terrific whoop, causing his mount to stop dead just as she was taking off: the shock bursting the girths, with the result that he was precipitated into the water still astride of the saddle, and so lost the race. "An' sure, Micky," said he, almost tearfully, "'twas a clane walk over till that divil's imp thripped me up."

The Squire and his cousin at that moment happened to call at the inn, and during the course of conversation with the landlord, learnt that Denis was giving a lecture to the village cobbler, illustrated by diagrams on the hearth. They therefore made their way to the tap-

room, and entered just as Denis was uttering the last sentence recorded.

"And is it old Kitty you're calling the devil's imp, Denis, when you had but your own bad riding to thank for getting spilt into the brook?" asked Egan.

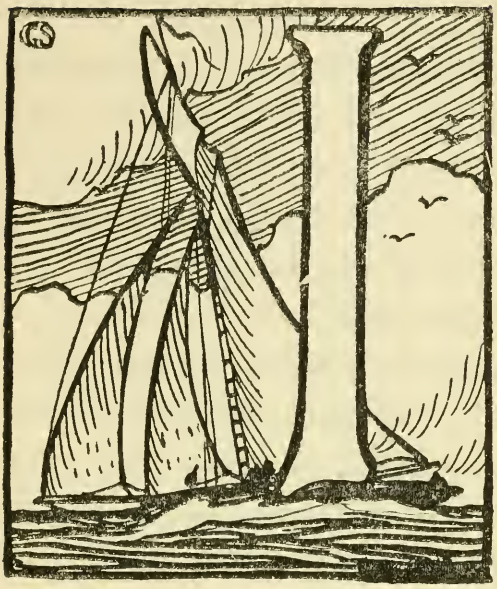
"Sure, your honour, I wouldn't spake an ill word iv the ould mare, for she's the best bit iv blood I iver threw leg across. I was just tellin' ould Micky here how, two years ago come Christmas, that snaking scoundhrel, Tim Denny, thripped up the hare wid a dose iv shot just as the hounds were runnin' into her."

For a minute or so the old cobbler stood gaping in speechless amazement, first at Denis and then at the Squire, and, in his bewilderment, rammed the ash-covered mouthpiece of the empty pipe into his capacious mouth. Having at length recovered somewhat, he cleaned his tongue and palate from a portion of the grit, and splutteringly opened upon his truthful friend as follows:—"An', be jabers, Denis, ye're the jewel iv a fireside jockey, an' I'd back ye agin any man livin' to ride over a steeplechase coorse on the hearthstone."

"And what's the new game with the paper and ashes?" inquired Egan, almost exploding with laughter, as Despard and he bent down to examine the cinder diagram.

But Denis heard not, for he had vanished into the night; leaving his pupil, McLoughlin, to explain how the newly invented game of hearthstone steeplechasing was played.

YULETIDE ON A 15-TONNER



I WAS sitting in solitude before the fire of my bachelor quarters, smoking and listening to the eerie wind-music played by the wild nor'-easter amongst the chimney-tops, and wondering how and where to spend Yuletide, which was but two days off, when a telegram was handed me, which ran as follows:—"Will you spend Christmas aboard *Seamew*? Plenty of wildfowl about. Wire.—JACK."

"By Jove! what a stroke of luck!" was my ejaculation, as I despatched a reply to my old friend, Jack M——, to the effect that I would join the yawl at Brightlingsea on Christmas Eve. I then set to work to overhaul my well-worn and somewhat shabby winter cruising kit; gave my favourite old long-chambered 12-bore a coat of "3-in-one," and last, but by no means least, loaded a goodly number of cartridges with a well-known "nitro," and different sizes of shot from No. 9 for snipe and small waders, up to 3's for worthier fowl.

The morning of my departure from smoky old London opened gloriously from a fowler's point of view, and as the express train rushed at fifty miles an hour along the ringing metals, I brushed away the frost-rime from the windows of my compartment, and saw, to my egotistical joy, that the ploughs and meadows were frozen hard as iron, and that even the rapid streams over which the train sped with a roar and a clash, were covered with a thick coating of ice. I say that I noticed these evidences of hard weather with selfish delight, for they told their own tale of goodly companies of wild duck and other fowl driven from the inland waters to the coast and estuaries whither I was bound. But, alas! they spoke also of hardship and suffering amongst the dark, noisome slums of the great city I was rapidly leaving behind me: hardships which made themselves felt perchance also in the peaceful hamlets and cottages dotted here and there over the icebound country through which I was speeding pleasure-bound.

I had but two fellow-passengers, one of whom had the appearance of a well-to-do, well-fed yeoman, who tried hard to draw me out on matters political—he was an ardent Protectionist—and the other a dapper, foxy-faced little man, who spent his time between smoking big cigars and damning frosty weather, and a stable of 'ack-'unters which were "heating their 'eads off, cuss 'em!"

Bidding the owner of the unemployed "screws," and Mr Chamberlain's champion, "Good-day" and a

"Merry Christmas," I journeyed down to Brightlingsea on the branch line. My friend Jack and old Gilson, a well-known East Coast fowler, who usually accompanies us on our winter cruises, met me at the railway station. Handing my gun-case and magazine to the latter, away we started for the dinghy, and twenty minutes later the *Seamew* was bowling through the white-crested combers of the North Sea, her lee-rail awash under the stiff nor'-easter and her old-fashioned bluff bows shaping towards the Thames Estuary.

"Are there no fowl in the Blackwater?" I asked of Jack, being somewhat surprised at his leaving the noted fowling-grounds of the Blackwater estuary.

"Yes, there are plenty of fowl round Mersey and Osea, and plenty of Cockney-gunners after them to boot," answered he; adding, "The old grounds are really not safe at holiday time, for Messrs Dick, Tom, and Harry will pull at anything wearing feathers and flying within a quarter of a mile range, and if one is in the direct line of fire, well, heaven preserve him from their shot!"

Cockney yachtsmen, and, indeed, Cockney sportsmen of any kind, have ever been a sore point with Jack, and he would in all probability have held forth at great length on the sporting peculiarities of the *genus* had not old Gilson drawn his attention to a big company of some kind of fowl bobbing up and down on the tide just inside the long line of white spume which fringed the vast expanse of sands on the Essex coast.

"A mixed lot they be, I doubt," said the old fowler, as he pointed his antiquated telescope in the direction of the company of wildfowl which lay about a mile and a half away on the starboard bow.

I went down to the cabin to fetch a pair of 10x Prisms glasses, and then, in spite of the heavy pitching of the yawl, I discovered the company to consist of at least a thousand head of different kinds of duck, including mallard, widgeon, pintail, pochard, and scaup; but, alas! I also discovered a dark dot drifting slowly up towards the vast assemblage of wildfowl. That dark spot was a single-handed gunning-punt, and, assisted by the powerful prisms, I very soon realised that the man who navigated her was well versed in the delicate art of setting to fowl. Lying prone on the floor of his low grey craft, and with less than the crown of his head showing above the fore-coaming, the distant punt-gunner crept nearer and nearer to the apparently sleeping fowl noiselessly, with never a splash, and, indeed, scarcely a ripple, ever keeping the muzzle of the stanchion gun pointing towards the thickest part of the pack.

"Yonder's Bill Cotgrove, and he be a-setting to the fowl wholly bootiful, and right dead up wind, too; but do 'ee get the guns on deck, gen'lemen, for like as not some will pass within shot of the yacht when he rises 'em," said old Gilson, as he watched the manœuvres of his brother professional with unalloyed admiration. Gilson's advice was good, and dropping into the cabin, I handed up M——'s double-8 and my own 12-bore, returning on

deck again just in time to hear the deep boom of Cotgrove's stanchion gun.

"By Jove! what a raking shot!" exclaimed Jack, who had witnessed the result of the "set" through his binoculars. "But look out! a thundering big bunch are heading straight for us," added the speaker, as he laid down the glasses and rammed a couple of No. 3 shot cartridges into the chambers of the heavy gun.

The excitement aboard the *Seamew* grew intense, as a bunch of at least three hundred duck of different kinds flew skimming over the water directly towards the yawl. On and on they came until almost within the range of the heavy shoulder gun. Then suddenly, as though scenting danger, they turned left-handed.

"Let 'em have it, sir!" cried Gilson, as he loosed off his long-barrelled, muzzle-loading 4-bore, without wreaking the slightest damage amongst the closely packed ranks of the fowl.

Jack was more fortunate, however, for although he failed to score with his right, a fat pintail doubled up like an old glove to the contents of the full-choked left barrel. It was a tremendously long shot, and one which spoke volumes for the hard-hitting powers of the long-barrelled gun. The bunch of fowl, after making a wide circuit towards the Kentish coast, suddenly turned off at a tangent in the direction taken by the main company, and in a very short time they were but mere specks on the eastern horizon.

"Deary me, Maister Jack, how that owd gun of yourn

do fetch 'em down and smash 'em up ! " said old Gilson, as he gathered the dead pintail with the cripple-net ; adding, " It were eighty yards off, if it were an inch."

It was now nearly midday, and Jack and myself tossed to decide which of us should go below and cook the mutton-chops and potatoes for luncheon. I cried " Head ! " but, as is usually the case, his Majesty's effigy in silver fell face downward, and I therefore crawled forward to the fo'c'stle to attend to my culinary duties. Thanks, however, to the famous little stove with which the yawl was furnished, within half-an-hour's time I was able to announce that tiffin was ready to be eaten on the swing-table in the snug little cabin.

We were in the middle of lunch when old Gilson, who had relieved M—— at the tiller, shouted down to us that a masterful girt snow-cloud was driving up from the nor'-east. My friend, who poses as a kind of human barometer, calmly remarked that he knew quite well the instant he got out of bed that morning that it would snow before night, and had been watching for that particular cloud ever since we left the Blackwater. I wondered why he had preserved in secret the knowledge of the approaching snowstorm until that moment ; but not wishing to appear dubious of his infallibility as a weather-prophet, I held my peace, and donned an extra sweater. Upon returning on deck, we found that a great mass of dark snow-clouds were driving threateningly towards us, and that although not a single flake

had yet fallen upon the main, that portion of the coast lying under the track taken by the clouds was covered in a white mantle.

"There be a power of wind behind they clouds. We'd best reef close down and run up the Crouch, for I doubt we're a-going to have dirty weather along with this yer snow," said old Gilson, as he looked up to windward somewhat anxiously.

To close-reef the mainsail and set a storm-jib was but the work of a few minutes, and fortunate was it that we took the sage advice of the experienced shell-back, for twenty minutes later down came the snow in a perfect blizzard, and with it a bitterly cold wind of half-gale strength, which sent the salt spray seething over the weather-coaming of the well in a perfect deluge. The snow fell faster and faster, until every object lying beyond the bowsprit-end was as completely veiled from view as the summit of a cloud-capped mountain, and the accompanying squalls would at times "heel" our little ship over until the dark foam-crested water flooded the lee-rail and deck almost level with the well-coaming. More than one heavy sea struck her quarter, and sent the salt spray hissing over the weather side.

"It be a proper owd snow-tempest, and if it do blow much harder us'll heve to lower the main and sail under mizzen and foresail, or danged if the mast won't carry away!" cried old Gilson, as he luffed the yacht to meet a squall that nearly laid her on her beam-ends.

"Oh, the old craft will weather it, for her spars and

rigging are as sound as any 15-tonner afloat," replied the owner of the *Seamew*, who thought the world of his somewhat old-fashioned but seaworthy little cruiser. "But can you find your way into the Crouch through this infernal blizzard, Gilson?" he continued, as he shovelled overboard a heap of snow from the cock-pit with the coal-shovel.

"Well, this yer pesky snow be very nigh as puzzling as a sea-fog. But I doubt not it will clear afore we fetch the 'Buxey,' and if so be, 'tis a clean reach right up to Burnham town, sir," replied the old gunner, whose grizzled head was white with frost-rime. "But, good God! look up to windward!" shouted Gilson, as he pointed to a huge white, phantomlike liner, which, to our horrified amazement, came bearing down upon us, bows on, through the blinding whirl of snowflakes.

"The dinghy! the dinghy!" cried M——. The cry came too late, however, for scarcely was the warning uttered than the sharp, towering stem of the steamer crashed into the dinghy, which we were towing astern. But we thanked our lucky stars that no more serious calamity befell us than the loss of our little tender.

"Hang the ugly, mud-churning old tramp for running down the very best dinghy that was ever turned out of Forrest's yard!" angrily exclaimed J——, shaking his fist towards the spot where he imagined the magnificent and speedy floating palace to be.

It was no use "crying over spilt milk," or, rather, a spilt dinghy, however, and having hove the yawl to,

we proceeded to haul in the painter, at the end of which remained but little beyond the stem and ring-bolt of the shattered tender.

"Don't cut it adrift, sir, it will do for firewood," said Gilson, as his master was about to sever the painter with a big clasp-knife. The skipper's advice was taken, and, getting the wreckage aboard, our little ship was once more racing havenwards through the heavy seas.

For at least an hour after the unpleasant incident mentioned above did we hug the Essex coast as closely as the rising spring-tide allowed, to try and find the buoy marking the entrance to the Crouch river. Our search proved futile, however, for the blizzard still raged, obscuring everything from view and chilling us to the very bone.

"Never a sight of either the Swin lightship or the Buxey buoy. Danged if I know where we be, gen'lemen! We'd best drop the anchor till this cussed snow-tempest do give a bit," at length exclaimed old Gilson, as with purple hands he cast the lead-line for the hundredth time.

The wind was now blowing off-shore, having veered round from north-east to due north, and the tide running over the treacherous and almost unbroken expanse of sands stretching between Sales Point and Wakering Stairs was therefore comparatively smooth. The cable rattled out as the anchor was dropped, and I for one began to wonder how long we might have to remain stationary; for at any moment the wind might again

change round towards the east, and render the sands almost a dead lee-shore. There was nothing for it, however, but to go below to kill time as best we might, and to listen to the weird discord set up by the sirens and foghorns of the shipping passing slowly up and down the fairway.

"Jolly way to spend Christmas Eve, old chap!" grinned my companion, as he raked up his winnings after a long run of luck at *écarté*, "but, thank heaven, we've enough grub, tobacco, and whisky aboard to keep us going for a week, if the worst comes to the worst."

I made no reply, for my thoughts at that moment were miles away, and in imagination I was sitting before the blazing Yule-logs in the wainscotted trophy-hung hall of a certain old manor-house nestling among the tors and heather of that home of the red stag, Exmoor.

At four o'clock M—— and myself took a turn on deck to find that the snow had cleared sufficiently to enable us to descry the distant outline of the snow-clad sea-walls of the marshes on the Essex shore. But what marshes they were neither of us could judge, for we knew not whether the yawl lay to the eastward or to the westward of the river Crouch. We therefore banged on the fore-deck with a thole-pin just over the spot where we guessed Gilson would be snoring in his bunk like a grampus, and a couple of minutes later the grizzled head of the old skipper bobbed up from the fo'c'stle hatchway, muttering, "Odd rot it! There be no rest for a man aboard a small

craft this weather. Doubt it's fog now, and be blowed to it!"

"Sorry to disturb your peaceful slumbers, Gilson, but it's clear enough for us to feel our way before dark," said M—— to the skipper, who looked round in a bewildered manner, as though still half-asleep.

The *Seamew* was once more got under weigh, and, keeping as close in as possible, we sailed along the shore, each man straining his eyes to obtain the first glimpse of Holliwell Point; for we imagined that the Crouch still lay to the westward. For some little time we reached on without sighting a headland or point of any kind, the seemingly endless sea-walls running ever parallel with the course of the yawl. Suddenly, however, the dark clouds which had obscured the sky for so many long hours cleared away as though by magic, a few scattered flakes alone falling into the tide.

"Call me a blessed Dutchman if yonder bunch of trees b'aint the clumps on Foulness! And, dang me, we've sailed right past the Crouch in that blamed snow, gen'lemen!" cried Gilson, who had climbed into the rigging to obtain a better view of the neighbouring marshes.

The old man was right, and, looking seaward, we saw the Maplin Light.

It was no use putting back to the Crouch, however, for the tide was now ebbing fast, and the well-sheltered and snug little creek of New England was the nearest anchorage available. Under easy canvas, the

Seamew was taken into this hospitable haven, and moored just off the homestead.

The greater part of the following morning was spent in preparing and cooking the Yuletide dinner, and I venture to say that no feast was ever eaten with greater relish than that which was served in the tiny saloon of the yawl *Seamew* on the Arctic-like Christmas Day of 1894.

WITH HORSE AND HOUND ON THE VELDT

NE glorious October evening, I left the dust and bustle of the golden city of Johannesburg behind me and rode along Bezutenhuits Valley, for the double purpose of paying a visit of inspection to the then recently imported pack of English fox-hounds, and of spending the night at the kennels. At the invitation of the M.F.H., I had arranged to act the part of honorary whipper-in next day, when the hounds were to meet at the Half-way Hotel, which is situate about midway between Johannesburg and Pretoria, on the old coach road.

I had ridden to within a mile of my destination when suddenly my ears were gladdened by a sound sweet as a peal of church bells, chiming across a wide river, now swelling, now falling in volume, until, softening and softening gradually lower and lower, the melody died away, and deathlike silence again reigned over that vast expanse of undulated veldt. It was the " singing "

of the little pack of English foxhounds exiled seven thousand long miles from their native shires; music I had not heard since I left the old country six years before.

A true sportsman only can imagine what fond memories of home that "hound music" brought back to me. For a time the bustle and excitement of everyday life abroad will teach a man to forget, but if he be at heart a sportsman, the whimper of even a single hound will awaken the slumbering memory of many a good run enjoyed with the dappled beauties in the dear old country at home, in which, mounted on some favourite and well-tried hunter, he held his own; or perchance his thoughts will hark back to that day at covert-side, ah! so many years ago, when a certain pair of bright eyes looked into his own so fondly, and—but hold! the rest of the story is sacred.

How well I remember a pathetic little incident I witnessed one morning while hunting with the Johannesburg hounds. Hounds were drawing a big blue gum plantation, and I had been told off to view away any buck that might happen to break at the far end of the covert. There was but one other follower waiting with me, a ragged, unkempt old fellow, mounted on a rough Basuto pony, whom I had often noticed loafing about the Johannesburg horse market. A challenge from old "Guardsman" was taken up by the full chorus of the pack, and the plantation was filled with glorious music. Suddenly the sound of deep, choking sobs, as

though of someone in dire distress, reached my ears, and, turning in the saddle, I saw the old loafer with head bowed down over his pony's neck, sobbing as though heartbroken. I rode towards him, but at a gesture he signed me not to approach nearer, and brokenly exclaimed, "Don't take any notice of me, sir, for I'm a —— weak fool; but the cry of those hounds reminded me of the old home I left twenty-five years ago, and which I shall never see again." Would the most eloquent sermon ever preached from pulpit have touched the one soft chord of that tough, world-beaten old heart, as did the cry of that little pack of exiled foxhounds ? I am afraid not.

And now that the singing of the hounds has died away I send my pony along at a smart canter, jump the wide spruit that has to be negotiated ere the kennels are reached, and ten minutes later draw rein before the huntsman's bungalow. Having done justice to an ample and appetising meal, I inspect the kennels, and find as good-looking a little pack as any man would wish to see, comfortably benched for the night. Then the huntsman takes me to view the first litter of foxhound puppies ever whelped in the Transvaal. " Ain't it a lovely picture and all," exclaims Tom, as he gazes fondly on the sleek and beautifully dappled little hounds nestling up to their matronly-looking badger-pyed dam, old " Amazon." Yes, it was a lovely picture, but, alas, not one of that litter of eight ever lived to hunt either " jack " or buck (there are no foxes in the Transvaal,

and therefore the pack were entered to jackal and antelope): nor was Tom P., although a most painstaking and good houndsman, ever successful in rearing a litter of whelps. For a time they would apparently thrive, and then suddenly contract a virulent form of distemper, a couple of days of which usually sufficed to wipe out a whole litter.

"We must start away before sunrise to-morrow, sir, for it's a good ten miles from the kennels to Half-way House; and it ain't worth the price of a red herring trying to hunt after the dew has gone, for the veldt don't hold a vestige of scent then."

"All right, Tom, you won't find me a laggard, when there's any sport to be had, I'll warrant," was my reply, and then, having finished my peg of old Montague dop, I turned in and was very soon hard and fast asleep. It wanted yet a couple of hours to daybreak when a long-drawn blast from Tom's horn caused me to jump out of the blankets, but so brilliant were the stars that we experienced but little difficulty in striking a bee-line towards the appointed fixture. More than once during the ride across the veldt hounds got on the line of a "jack," but were, of course, whipped off, for the business of the day was not to begin until later. Half-way House being anything but a getatable place, not more than a score of members of the Johannesburg Hunt Club put in an appearance, including the M.F.H., and two ladies, both of whom were at one time well-known followers of the V.W.H. After a breakfast of tender and delicious

steinbok, chops, and steaks, hounds were taken off to draw a big eucalyptus plantation in which, the landlord of the hotel informed us, was harboured a small herd of steinbok. By the time we were in the saddle, the sun was just appearing above the tops of a distant range of chocolate-brown hills, and a peculiar haze floated in the air a few feet above the surface of the earth.

"It should be a good scenting day, Tom, don't you think?" cried the master, as he jogged along on a fine upstanding Cape stallion, amongst the "dappled darlings" he loved so well, and had chosen with much care and expense from the very best kennels in England.

"Well, yes, the veldt should hold good scent and all this morning, for the dew lies very heavy; but scent be a wonderful tricky thing, sir," replied Tom to the master's question.

The cheery cry of "Huic, covert, huic! Push 'em up, my little beauties; hie, wind 'em!" re-echoes through the big eucalyptus covert, as the huntsman cheers his hounds on to draw. Suddenly a whimper from old "Rascal" is taken up by the full chorus of the pack, and a few minutes later the soul-stirring cry of "Tally-ho! Gone away. Gone aw-a-a-y!" is shrieked out by the second whip, from the far end of the covert.

In almost less time than it takes to write it, the eager pack are out of covert and streaming over the veldt at a pace that proclaims the M.F.H. did not err in saying, "It should be a good scenting day."

The master, huntsman, and perhaps a dozen of the

field, are well up with the hounds, and the ladies hold their own with the best of them. In places the high, rank vegetation of the veldt reaches well above the saddle-girths, hiding completely from view even the waving sterns of the flying pack. Galloping through this rough veldt grass and sage-bush is rendered dangerous by innumerable antbear earths, meerkat holes, and other horse-traps quite invisible to the human eye. It is little short of marvellous, however, the manner in which the native-bred horses and ponies, more especially the Basuto ponies, dodge these pitfalls by jumping over or swerving to one side of them.

But, mark, the hounds which might almost be covered with the proverbial sheet, have just turned off right-handed and head for yonder Dutch farm, round which is built a high and roughly constructed stone wall. The hunt ponies have been schooled over every kind of obstacle and jump like deer, but a good many of the horses ridden by the members of the J.H.C. have never been over anything of more importance than the average spruit or nullah, and at least two-thirds of the field go off at a tangent before the wall is reached.

The master and huntsman fly the obstacle girth and girth, and the ladies, following their lead, manage to get over. It is " touch and go " with one of them, however, for her galloway pecks badly on landing, and very nearly deposits the fair rider into a prickly-pear bush. One man comes a cropper, but on the right side of the wall, and although a little stream of crimson trickling from a cut in

the forehead tells its own tale, he is very soon in the saddle again, and comes pounding along to try and make up the ground the mishap has lost to him. For five and twenty minutes we have been riding at almost steeplechase pace, and so good is the scent and so fast the run that there has been scarcely any music since we left covert. But, when passing the homestead, as though out of "sheer cussedness," such a glorious crash of music breaks the dead silence of the still early morning that it awakens the slumbering family of Doppers dwelling at the homestead, and the whole herd, male and female, headed by a great bearded giant, armed with a rifle, rush out into the *stoep* garbed in all sorts of strange and fearful raiment. "What the —— do you *verdommed rooineks* mean by riding over my farm with your mongrel dogs, spoiling my crops. *Voetsack*" (get out) "or I'll shoot," roars out the infuriated Boer, in fairly fluent English, to the huntsman, whom he evidently imagines to be *Baas* of the hunt. "All right, uncle, we'll soon be off your allotment now, and if we kill, I'll leave a bit of venison for you," replies the good-tempered huntsman, as he gallops past the *stoep*. A few minutes later both he and his hounds are over the second wall.

The steinbok is now running in view, as the veldt here, and for a couple of miles ahead, has been fired, and there is not a vestige of herbage to be seen.

"Forrard! forrard! forrard!" shrieks out Tom, as he cheers on the eager, straining pack, fearful that they may not gain the blood they thirst for and so richly

EACH MAN TRYING TO OUTRIDE HIS FELLOW

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deserve, for he, with the keen and experienced eye of a huntsman, knows full well that if once the quarry gains yonder chain or boulder-strewn kopjes, towards which it is heading, the run will prove bloodless. No horse ever yet foaled could find a footing up the side of those steep, rocky hills, and the hot rays of the sun will already have dissipated what little scent might have been found when the scant herbage which clothes them was wet with dew. For forty minutes have the hounds been running without the slightest check, and at a pace they seldom, if ever, showed in their native shires, for beyond the walls enclosing the angry Dutchman's farm not so much as a spruit has been met with during the run, and never was such a burning scent. By Jove! the buck is pointing towards the reed-fringed pan of water which lies shimmering under the bright rays of the sun like a sheet of burnished steel. Yes, in he plunges, and now it is a case of sit down and ride, and the devil take the hindmost. "Forrard! forrard! forrard! my little beauties," again cries the huntsman, as he rides close to the sterns of the hounds, as though his Satanic majesty were behind him. "Hell for leather" we go, each man striving to outride his fellow, heedless of the fact that his mount is sobbing out, "Bellows to mend"—heedless of anything on earth in his struggle to be in at the death.

By George! what a horrible purler the man on the big Free-Stater has gone, as his mount puts a foot into an antbear earth, turns a complete somersault, and shoots his rider out of the saddle like a bag of nails: but

although evidently groggy, the worthy Landrost mounts again, for, like all good sportsmen, be they Briton or Boer, he hates to be beaten. A mighty splash, and ten couple of hounds are madly swimming across the shallow pan towards the beautiful little antelope, which, having "soiled," is struggling gallantly to reach the farther shore. But he has stopped to "soil" too long, for several couple of the older and more knowing hounds have skirted the shore, and are already baying round the margin of a clump of tall reeds towards which he is swimming, while those that have taken the water are close on his haunches. At length he touches the ground and, with a great spring, jumps clean over the heads of his pursuers. But the gallant little animal's last bolt is shot. Old "Amazon" has fastened on to his withers, and in a moment he is pulled down by a living torrent of bloodthirsty, half-maddened hounds. "Whoo-whoop!" and my best and fastest run with the first pack of English foxhounds that ever crossed the Transvaal border is over.

IMPROMPTU SPORT ON THE VELDT

ULKA, baas; ku cile" (Rise, sir; it is dawn), cried my Kaffir servant, Jacob, as he passed a steaming cup of coffee through the fly of the waggon bucksail. "There are great hundreds of birds on the pan, but no flesh-meat in the *staan-plek*" (camp), continued the native as a gentle reminder that he and his fellow *loup-boys* and drivers had not been doled out their usual ration of antelope venison for several days.

Telling Jacob to call *Baas* H——, my fellow transport-rider, and to muster all the available boys, I jumped into my clothes, and having made the best breakfast it was possible to make from the now somewhat limited commissariat of tinned provisions, I took my 12-bore and a goodly number of Nos. 3, 6, and 9 shot cartridges (the latter for snipe and quail) and cantered off on a poor-looking, but wonderfully hardy, Basuto pony to H——'s outspan, which lay about a mile and a half

farther along the rough nullah-crossed, boulder-strewn veldt track that did duty for a road.

Day was just dawning, and the first bright streaks of early morning were beginning to show above the summits of a far-away broken chain of brown kopjes. As far as the eye could reach, a vast expanse of rank-verdure clad, level veldt stretched away to the hazy blue horizon, a cluster of hive-like Kaffir *kraals*, a few stunted acaciæ-trees, patches of sugar and *wach-een-bitjee* bush being the only objects to break the wearying monotony of mile upon mile of virgin plain.

Some three leagues to the northward of our outspan ran the Limpopo, the dense belt of jungle fringing its banks being dimly visible from the Pretoria-Pietersburg road along which we were then travelling *en route* to Bulawayo. To the westward lay a small reed-fringed pan or lagoon of water, and at no great distance from it was a large patch of sugar-bush interspersed with long grass and rough cover, which appeared likely ground for korhaan, francolin, and quail.

Upon arriving at H——'s outspan, I found that he had finished breakfast and was ready for the fray, while Jacob had mustered his ebon force of beaters. And a mixed lot they were, consisting of two Zulus, three Basutos, two Swazis, three Fingoes, and a tiny yellow monkey-like Bushman, who, in spite of his thieving propensities (he would steal the most useless articles for the sake of stealing), was by far and away the best horse and mule boy we had.

Long before reaching the pan, we could see, by the aid of our field-glasses, that Jacob did not err in stating that there were "great hundreds" of birds on the water, for indeed there were, and of many different kinds, from the great spur-wing (*Pleetropterus gambensis*) and Egyptian goose (*Chenalopex ægystiaca*) down to the pink-bill teal and dab-chick, the latter darting and diving here and there amongst the beautiful purple water-lilies and aquatic plants, for all the world like his little British cousin, who, by-the-by, he almost exactly resembles. A big colony of quarrelsome old coots had taken possession of one end of the lagoon, and right well did they hold it against the incursions of their more peaceful neighbours, the geese and ducks.

Assembled on a long spit of ooze, which had been left high and dry by heavy droughts, was a big flock of sacred ibis, quartering and boring into the soft mud like so many huge curlews, while nimbly dodging here and there along the spongy shores were to be seen numbers of waders, amongst them the avocet and black-winged stilt, conspicuous in their black and white plumage.

Telling the beaters to halt at the widest end of the pear-shaped pan until given the signal to wade towards us in line, H—— and myself went to look for suitable stands amongst the reeds at the other end. With the tepid water and foully-smelling slime oozing into the tops of our field-boots at every step, we waded gingerly through shoals of hideous mud-fish and small grey lizards until firmer footing among the reed-cover was reached.

The naked Kaffirs now advanced, yelling and splashing like devils incarnate. A gaggle of between thirty and forty spur-wings were first put up by the yelling herd, and with loud trumpetings they flew down the lagoon straight for my companion's blind. The sharp eyes of the great birds must have "twigged" some portion of H——'s anatomy through the openings in the reed-cover, however, for while yet a good 60 yards distant they suddenly turned off left-handed, and away across the veldt they flew in ⩾-shaped formation. Not one of those geese showed the slightest sign of damage from the double dose of No. 3's which H—— poured into them, but, as many of my readers are aware, it would be a powerful 12-bore gun that would bring down a tough old spur-wing at 60 yards. My stand being some 80 yards distant from that of H——, I did not, of course, get a shot at the geese; but in this I was not greatly disappointed, for to all intents and purposes we were shooting for the pot, and by no stretch of imagination could even a young spur-wing goose be called a good table-bird.

A small bunch of coots was next driven forward by the beaters, a couple of which, flying a little apart from their fellows, and coming straight for me at a pace that would not have disgraced driven partridges, offered a sporting "right and left" which I could not resist. Holding, as I imagined, well before the leading bird, I pulled, but he went on without leaving so much as a feather behind, and I only succeeded in dropping his consort with a

broken wing. To my disgust, one of the empty cartridge cases jammed, and before I could extract it a nice little lot of pink-billed teal passed clean over my head, and with merry cacklings away they sped to some quiet and peaceful pool across the veldt. There was no time to weep over spilt milk, or, rather, sped fowl, however, for H—— was blazing away almost as quickly as he could load and fire, and the lagoon seemed alive with fowl. Suddenly loud cries, in strangely mixed Dutch and Zulu, of "*Allemaytig; pas op, baas, pas op, nansiya schellem*" (Almighty; look out, sir, look out, there goes the scoundrel), reached my ears, but, owing to the dense clumps of reeds which intervened between the boys and my blind, I could see nothing bearing the slightest resemblance to a *schellem*. As I watched, however, the hideous, tusk-armed snout of a huge wart-hog suddenly emerged from the reed-cover about 150 yards distant from me. Unfortunately I had that morning taken out a new and almost full-choked 12-bore instead of my old combined rifle and shot gun, with which I might have made pretty certain of the pig. The wart-hog proved himself an excellent swimmer, and in a very short time he was on *terra firma* and slinging along towards a wooded kloof in the neighbouring kopjes, at a pace that would have put the best of our Basuto ponies on their mettle. It was with a sigh of regret that I watched him fleeting across the level, for he was a big fellow, and would have provided several days' meat for the boys, besides tit-bits, in the shape of fry, tongue, etc., for H—— and myself.

My fellow gun was still hard at it, and I saw him drop duck after duck, and teal after teal, as only a good shot knows how to drop them. Very few came my way, however, and again I am bound to confess that the number of empty cartridge-cases which lay strewn round my stand greatly exceeded the number of slain. At length the splashing sound made by the natives, as they half-swam, half-waded through the breast-deep water, reached our ears, and then small companies of coots, and one or two hammer-kops, began to sneak out of their last havens of refuge. On and on came the dusky birds towards the hidden guns, now running over a spit of greasy ooze, and now quietly paddling through the many open channels in the carpet-like growth of lilies and other water plants. With a mighty to-do, up rise the whole company of between three and four hundred coots, and the next moment they come sweeping over my head. Pulling both barrels into the "brown," or, rather, the black of them, four of their number fall with resounding splashes almost at my feet, while another, after carrying on for about 200 yards, pitches into an antbear earth on the veldt, from which it is gathered later.

The slime-soiled, reeking Kaffirs next came into view, and the last belt of reeds was beaten out; but beyond a small flock of sacred ibis which broke back over the heads of the beaters, it held nothing, and the drive being now over, the boys were set to work to gather the spoil. Doubtless a good number of wounded birds escaped the

eyes of our not too vigilant human retrievers by hiding up in the dense reed-cover; and then, again, my meagre contribution to the bag would have been trebled had I but shot in anything like the form shown by my companion. In spite of these facts the fowl, when laid out on the shore of the lagoon, made a very fair show; among them being grey duck, pink-bill teal, coots, avocet, and greenshank.

Having sent all the noisy beaters back to the outspan, with the exception of Jacob, who was retained to carry the spare cartridge-bag and any game we might kill, H—— and myself started off across the veldt to try for korhaan and francolin. A walk of twenty minutes or so took us to the bush-veldt mentioned earlier herein, and we commenced to beat through many acres of rank, waist-high grass, from which the sun had not yet dissipated the heavy night dew, and in a very short space of time our thin khaki clothing was soaked through and through. Such small discomforts, however, were soon forgotten, for scarcely had we entered the bush when a leash of red-wing francolin rose with a whirr between H—— and myself. Once more my friend scored a pretty right and left to his credit, and the remaining bird in crossing me afforded a shot that the veriest tyro could not easily have muffed; and he, too, was dropped into Jacob's flour-sack, which did duty for game-bag.

A small hare (*Lepus capensis*) was next afoot, to be promptly bowled over by H——, who shot into the moving grass, the animal itself being invisible to the human eye,

owing to the height and density of the herbage through which it was passing. Then, for some little time, nothing wearing either fur or feather was moved; but while walking on the outskirts of a strip of *'mcopi* thorns a red-crested bustard rose silently, and just out of shot of me. After a short, wavering kind of flight, the beautiful bird pitched into a patch of grass and sage bush, and, knowing the running powers of the bustard family, all haste was made towards the spot. Very carefully did we beat through and through that patch of cover, but, with the exception of a pair of meerkats, which stood up on their hindlegs and gazed at us with wondering eyes, not a living creature was there to be seen, and I began to think that the bustard had stolen away to safer harbourage. But a yell of "*Nansiya; nansiya*" (There he is; there he is) from Jacob, who was walking between H—— and myself, caused me to look round, and the next moment I had the unspeakable pleasure of seeing the bird we were in search of double up like a mottled rag to the contents of my companion's right barrel. My turn was to come, however, as will be shown hereafter.

"I say, D——, don't you think we might manage to hustle the pig we saw this morning out of the kloof, if we set the boys and their mongrels to beat the bush?" remarked H——, as we sat smoking and resting in the shade afforded by a thorn-tree amidst the bush-veldt.

"The kloof, which is very narrow at this end, only runs a short distance into the kopjes, and the bush is

thin and patchy," continued he, as he puffed out a great cloud of Boer tobacco smoke, in the vain endeavour to drive away a swarm of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, which buzzed round his head like a swarm of bees round a hive. Now, considering our little expedition could boast but eleven Kaffirs and three mongrel, ferrety-looking curs, the latter being, as Jacob very tersely remarked, "useless *schellems* not worthy their *skoff*," the suggestion even appeared somewhat absurd. However, as the day was still young, and we were not to *trek* on till night, we agreed to beat the kloof: and our henchman was despatched to the outspan to exchange the 12-bores for a pair of combined rifle-shot guns, and to bring out the boys and their *schellem hunds*.

In due course the Kaffirs, headed by Jacob, came stringing across the veldt, laughing and jabbering like a troop of monkeys, the rear-guard being formed by the leash of nondescript, ferret-barrelled, slouching curs mentioned above. In truth, a sorrier-looking party of beaters it would have been hard to find, and at the moment I would have laid long odds on the pig.

The *kloof*, which lay at no great distance from our resting-place, was formed by a funnel-shaped cleft running between two boulder-strewn kopjes, a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, the narrow part or entrance leading into the open veldt. A little tree-fern fringed stream of iron-discoloured water trickled down from its source amongst the hills, and wormed a sinuous course through the dense scrub-bush, with which in parts

the *kloof* was clothed, until it reached the open veldt; and so on and on towards the Limpopo. While walking along this spruit to find a stand from which I might sight Master Piggy if he took it into his head to break veldtwards, Jacob (having injured his foot, he had been told off to carry my gun, etc.) suddenly drew my attention to a number of slot-prints in the red, clayey soil of the stream. "*Inkonka*" (bush-buck), laconically remarked the Zulu as he bent down to examine the spoor. The spoor did not appear fresh, however, and I continued along the bank until arriving at a big outcrop at the base of the *kopje*, from which a clear view right across the neck of the *kloof* was obtainable. Here I took up my stand, and, telling Jacob to hide as much of his huge anatomy as possible behind the outcrop, I awaited events. My companion in the meanwhile had taken the boys to the head of the cleft, for, like the good fellow he was, he was anxious that I should get a shot at something worth shooting at if possible, before the return to camp was made.

Soon the yells of the ebon beaters resounded through the *kloof*, and an occasional "yap" from the curs told me that game of some kind was afoot. Knowing, however, that a Kaffir dog will give tongue to anything, from a shrew-mouse to an elephant, I shrewdly suspected that a *klip-das* (rock-rabbit) was the quarry they were hunting. The ear-splitting whoops and yells came nearer and nearer as the excited, sweating natives struggled through the more open covert, or thrashed the impenetrable

clumps of matted thorn-bush with their knob-kerries, but not so much as a hare or rock-rabbit broke. At length, all but one small strip of jungle remained unbeaten, and I had almost given up hope of getting a shot at the pig, or, indeed, at anything, when a sharp, bark-like sound, which appeared to come from amidst the bush just below, reached my ears. Jacob also heard the sound, and whispering, "It's a bush-buck," he strained his eyes towards the fringe of covert. The next instant, with a great spring, a bush-buck jumped into the open within 50 yards of me, and for a moment he halted dead as though undecided whether to return to his natural *habitat*, where such a hullabaloo was going on, or to seek a quieter haven across the veldt. He halted too long, however, for offering an absurdly easy broadside shot, the ·303 "dum-dum" from my left barrel dropped him stone-dead where he stood.

It was a young buck, and carried but a poor head; so poor, indeed, that we did not trouble to measure his horns. Nevertheless, he was a welcome addition to the pot, which was better filled that evening than it had been for many days during the long *trek* northwards. What became of the wart-hog of the morning will never be known: for he was not seen during the impromptu drive of the *kloof*.

OLD Gilson, our skipper and professional puntsman, having obtained a couple of days' leave to attend the wedding of his youngest daughter, we had, perforce, to kill time as best we could during his absence, for the somewhat heavy double-handed punt, built to carry a breech-loading stanchion gun, was altogether too much for one man to handle. We therefore elected to do a bit of shore-popping. The sun was just rising above the horizon as we were performing our matutinal ablutions in the cockpit of the light-draught 15-ton yawl which forms our floating cottage whenever we go a-fowling.

A more glorious sunrise it would be difficult to imagine. The eastern sky was simply a blaze of colour —fiery red, rose-pink, carmine, gold, and turquoise— and the rippleless, mirror-like surface of the tide reflected the glory until it appeared to be a veritable "painted ocean." We have watched the sun rise and set in the tropics; we have gazed in awed admiration

upon the wondrous glow of the northern lights from the north-west prairie, on a bright Canadian winter's night; but never have we witnessed anything in Nature more beautiful than the English seascape we have endeavoured here to portray.

"A main splendid marnin', and no mistake, maister," remarked a guernsey-clad giant of a fisherman, as he rested from his arduous task of bait-digging, for a few minutes, to admire the kaleidoscopic cloud-picture. "But," added he, wielding his wooden spade more vigorously than before, "I doubt yonder sun be a-bringin' masterful dirty weather along with him."

My fisher friend proved a wise weather prophet, for it blew a hard gale that night, and a coasting schooner drove ashore within a few cable lengths of the yawl and became a total wreck on the stone-faced sea-wall, her crew of three men and a boy narrowly escaping with their lives.

The incoming tide was beginning to flood the outlying ooze-flats as we waded towards the beach through some six inches of batter-like mud. A vast expanse of saltings and ooze-flats was open to us to south, east, and west; a small fishing hamlet, containing, perhaps, fifty cottages, a couple of inns, and a general store, being the only sign of civilisation to be found within a radius of several miles.

The village having no great attraction for me, I set my course in a contrary direction, towards a wide stretch of salt-marshes which, although reputed to be

what are known as "manorial rights," have for generations past been regarded as "any man's manor" by local gunners.

I had not proceeded far on my way when a couple of redshanks— less wary than the majority of their species—got up from a muddy little gully within 40 yards of me. I managed to wing one of the birds at my second attempt, but the other went scolding and screeching across the mud-flats, apparently unscathed by the contents of my first barrel.

Old Jet, the retriever, who usually accompanies me on my "shore-popping" expeditions, being under the care of the local vet., I had perforce to gather the 'shank myself. Though its wing was very badly smashed, the bird ran like a rabbit up the serpentine gully, and it was only by sprinting across the saltings that I prevented it harbouring in a growth of sea-lavender.

While chasing the redshank I noticed a small bunch of lapwings settle on a patch of black ground a short distance away from a fleet of stranded fishing smacks, and within a quarter of a mile of the shore. Now, by making a *detour* over the ooze-flats, and then carefully keeping the largest of the smacks between the birds and myself, I thought it possible that I might be able to stalk them. Pulling the long tuck-boots well up (although the ooze was not sufficiently soft for mud-boards, one might at any moment blunder waist-deep into an old bait-hole), I walked seaward for

a distance of, perhaps, half-a-mile, until the smack lay immediately between the lapwings and myself. By this *manœuvre* I had the wind dead ahead, and consequently my scent would not be carried down to the birds.

Keeping the friendly smack ever between the quarry and myself, I covered the first half of the stretch of mud as expeditiously as my heavy sea-boots and the sticky going would permit, but upon nearing the vessel I proceeded more gingerly. At length, after what appeared to have been a week of mud-trotting, I gained the cover afforded by the smack, and, peering round her counter, had the satisfaction of seeing the lapwings still on the spit of black ground, and within easy range of me. Needless to add that the appearance of the tip of a nose round the stern of the fish-reeking boat was quite sufficient to set every bird a-wing, and, pulling into the " dense " of the whirling bunch of black and white, four birds dropped like stones, while another, hard hit, after carrying on bravely for some little distance shorewards, pitched into a vast growth of salt-wort. Having gathered the dead 'uns, three of which were sadly bedraggled from falling into a pool of muddy water, I went to hunt for the cripple, but after a long and fruitless search I was reluctantly compelled to leave the unfortunate bird to the tender mercies of the " hoodies," black-back gulls, and other winged scavengers of the foreshores, who are ever on the watch for wounded birds.

While hunting about for the wounded lapwing, a spring of twelve or thirteen teal rose from a muddy drain on the saltings just out of range. As luck had it, however, I was able to mark them down into a small creek which debouched on the shore a short quarter of a mile ahead of me. Fearful that some other gunner might steal a march on me, I lost no time in setting out after the little duck, and, by keeping to a sheep-run under a high sea-wall, which shut out what are known as the meal-marshes from the salt-marshes, I was able to make far better "pace" than would have been possible had we stuck to the gully-intersected saltings. Having covered about two-thirds of the distance, I climbed over the sea-wall, and, walking noiselessly over the rank grass which fringed the banks of a small dyke running alongside the escarpment, I very soon came to a second wall, which protected the easternmost point of the marshes from the inroads of the tide, and from the top of which an excellent view of the creek was obtainable. Now came the most delicate part of the stalk, for, although teal appear to be the least shy of any of the duck family when found on inland streams and lakes, where there is usually plenty of cover for them to harbour in, they generally become wary enough on the coast, unless the weather be exceptionally severe or stormy, when they will often sit in a well-sheltered gully until one is almost on top of them. Pushing my gun before me as I crawled hand over hand up the face of the embankment until my head was on a level with the top,

KEEPING WELL SCREENED BEHIND THE ROUGH COVER

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then cautiously peering through a growth of high bents, I scanned every yard of the open creek which ran immediately below; but never a sight of a teal, or indeed of fowl of any kind, was there to be seen on its unruffled surface or muddy shores. "Flown!" was my muttered ejaculation, as I laid the 12-bore across the top of the wall. But almost before the word had escaped my lips, a little rotund form, quickly followed by a number of others, suddenly emerged from a small gut, which, after worming its way through the salt-marshes, emptied itself into the creek at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards from the sea-wall.

Instead of working up the creek and towards me, however, the teal—for such they proved to be—began to paddle seawards, and, although not by any means an expert fowl-caller, I decided to try and call the beautiful little duck within shot. Placing the tip of my tongue against the roof of my mouth, I gave a species of whistle which seemed to scare the teal more than anything else, for they travelled down creek a good deal faster than before. But the second attempt was certainly an improvement on the first, and the little fowl ceased paddling for a moment, and looked back to see whence the strange call came. The third call resulted in an answering challenge, and the teal came up the creek slowly but surely towards my "lay-up." On and on they came, until almost within range, when suddenly, to my unspeakable disgust, a shepherd, accompanied by a bobtailed sheep-dog, appeared round

a bend of the sea-wall, and the next instant the teal were speeding seawards. Alas! such disappointments as this occur only too often in a season's wildfowling.

It was useless bewailing, however; and, sliding down the face of the sea-wall, I once more set out along the salts.

For some little time not a "feather" did I see, with the exception of a small "trip" of dunlins, which I did not deem worthy powder and shot. At length, after a somewhat tiring trudge along three miles of saltings, slob, and sand-dunes, I came to an old duck-hole, or gunning-pit, which some luxurious "shore-popper" had evidently occupied since the high spring tides of the preceding week, for the pit was free of water, and both the floor and seat were well strewn with hay. Here I decided to call a halt and to hide up for any birds which might be driven in by the tide.

I had just settled down comfortably in the pit when a shrill, far-reaching "cur-leew" came to my ears. The call appeared to come from behind me, and although my head was well below the level of the saltings among which the duck-hole had been sunk, I sat close, not daring to turn, until, out of the corner of one eye, I saw a number of rapidly moving forms passing left-handed. Now was the time for action, and, springing to my feet, I sent a couple of doses of No. 5 "chilled" into a herd of between fifty and sixty curlew. A couple crumpled up to my first shot, and a single bird to the second, the latter—a runner—leading me a merry

dance among the innumerable drains and runnels before I captured it, for, owing to the jamming of both the empty cartridge-cases, and having stupidly left the extractor aboard the yacht, I was unable to give him the *coup de grace.* Finally I ran him into an improvised dry dock which had been cut in the saltings at the base of the sea-wall for the purpose of unloading manure barges, and, the sides of the same being too steep for the curlew either to climb or flutter up, I very soon had him bagged.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, and all the outlying, and a great number of the middle banks and ooze-flats, were awash. By the aid of a powerful pair of prism-glasses I was enabled to watch the movements of the different kinds of waders—grey, green, and ring plover, curlew, redshanks, knots, oyster-catchers, and herons—while a great flock of oxbirds passed restlessly over the serrated margin of the flats, now appearing like a dark cloud rising up from the surface of the North Sea, and now like a volume of white mountain-mist as, with the precision of a well-drilled battalion of infantry, they displayed alternately the dark plumage of their backs and then their snow-white under parts, during rapid flight. Out on the main, beyond the treacherous sand-ridge upon which the timbers of many a gallant vessel lie bleaching, were to be seen several companies of mallard, widgeon, and pintail; while still farther out a goodly herd of brent geese floated motionless and apparently asleep after feasting upon the succulent roots

of sea-wrack, which forms their staple food. But I warrant there were wakeful sentinels enough among those sable ranks to give timely warning of the approach of a punt-gunner. Those tantalising brents have been in the neighbourhood ever since the early part of December last, and Heaven only knows how many big-gunners (myself included) have attempted to outmanœuvre them with swivel gun and punt by day and night. Be this as it may, so far as I know only seven of those wary black geese have been accounted for up to the present; and those seven were shot by a deaf old gunner who set to the fowl in a single-handed punt one fine moonlight night as they were feeding on the half-flooded ooze-flats. There is but little doubt that the solitary brent which appears on our own list of fowl killed up to date (January 28) had been hit by one or two pellets of "BB" from old W——'s antiquated swivel gun before we put it *hors de combat.*

But to return to the duck-hole. The flood-tide began to drive the waders towards the inlying flats, and several small "trips" of redshanks passed just out of shot of me, as I sat, with Micawber-like patience, in the gunning-pit, "waiting for something to turn up." A grey heron sailed over my head at no great height, and it would have been an easy matter to have brought it down, but not possessing any predilection for roast heron, and still less for killing for the sake of killing, I refrained from pulling.

Next, a couple of oyster-catchers flew within thirty

yards of the pit, and, having no greater "hankering" for roast sea-pie than I have for roast heron, these were also allowed to go on their way unscathed.

The tide by this time was almost at its height, and as the last patches of black ground and ooze were flooded I began to think that my chance of further sport that morning was decidedly poor, unless, perchance, I managed to fall in with something during the return walk along the shore. But "jade" Fortune sometimes smiles upon the wild-fowler when he least expects her to be kind. I had just taken a pull at my flask, preparatory to vacating the gunning-pit, when the report of a couple of shots fired on the enclosed marshes behind put me on the *qui vive*. A minute later a bunch of nine mallard skimmed over the top of the sea-wall, and then came heading straight for my hiding-place. The bunch swung past me left-handed, and, pulling at a fine mallard flying on the flank of his fellows, I had the satisfaction of seeing it drop with a thud on the saltings; while with my left I brought down a duck which, although not so clean killed as the mallard, was too hard hit to struggle down to the tide.

The morning being now well advanced, and having a considerable amount of correspondence to "wade through" for the afternoon mail, I retraced my footsteps to the yacht, thoroughly well satisfied with shore-popping, the world, and life generally.

A COLD FOWLING CRUISE

MANY readers will remember that the winter of 1894-95 was almost Arctic in its severity. The inland waters were frozen over, the ground was hard as iron, hunting and steeplechasing were stopped throughout the United Kingdom for nine or ten weeks on end, unfortunate householders, with blue noses, growlingly dipped chilblained fingers into their purses for the repairing of burst waterpipes, roundly anathematising King Frost the while; in short, it was a bitter winter, and the only men who derived any benefit from its rigour were skaters, wildfowlers, and plumbers.

It was during the early part of this hard winter that I joined the 15-ton yawl *Seamew*, which was lying fitted out for a week's cruise in search of fowl and fish along the East coast, in the canal basin, Gravesend.

As neither my sailing companion, Captain J., nor myself were particularly anxious to spend a night in the muddy little dock, we agreed to sail down to

Egypt Bay or Yantlett Creek without delay. The tide being very nearly slack, the dock dues being paid, and, following close in the wake of a topsail-barge which also happened to be leaving the basin to sail down-along on the ebb, we hugged the Kentish shore as closely as was advisable, passing the fairway buoys on the port hand.

The moon was well up, but owing to the dark masses of snow-clouds, which drove at a furious pace across the heavens, she threw but a fitful light upon the grey foam-flecked tideway, and it was by the merest accident that we escaped being piled up on a barge lying at anchor, the crew of which had neglected to hoist a riding light. The bitter nor'-easter strengthened every moment, and before we passed Mucking Light it had increased to almost a gale. The third reef had scarcely been tied down in the mainsail, when down came the snow in a perfect blizzard, obscuring every object lying a dozen yards beyond the bowsprit end. The one-man "crew" suggested that it would be a wise proceeding to run into Hole Haven for shelter, as the creek would afford snug and safe anchorage while the storm held. Gilson's suggestion was an excellent one, and as neither my sailing companion nor myself had ever entered the haven, Gilson took the tiller, and immediately made a board over to the Essex side.

"Do you think you can find your way into the haven in this snow?" asked the captain of the "crew," as the latter took his place at the helm.

"Ay, ay, sir! with my eyes shut!" was the cocksure reply.

With the wind almost abeam, and with a boiling tide in her favour, the *Seamew* simply tore through the water, her lee-decks often buried up to the very coach-roof in a smother of foam, while the spray came over the weather-rail in icy clouds, lashing our faces like the thong of a whip, and finding its way down the collars of our oilskins in a cool and invigorating sort of manner.

On and on raced the yawl through storm and snow, and, staunch though she was, she carried just about as much canvas as she knew how to stagger under. So dense was the snow that not a light was there to be seen either ashore or afloat, but the weird shriek of a steamer's siren, or the hoarse booing of a foghorn, warned us more than once that we were sailing dangerously close to the merchant vessels lying weather-bound or passing slowly up and down the fairway.

"Isn't it about time we were off Hole Haven?" asked the captain of Gilson, after the latter had been at the tiller for nearly an hour.

The helmsman, in his quaint East-coast dialect, declared that "That theere wor jest what he'd a-been thinkin'."

Scarcely had he uttered the words when the deep boom of a bell was heard above the roar of the gale, and with a "Good heavens! that's the *Chapman*, and we're heading clean for the sands!" the captain snatched the tiller from the unfortunate "crew," and sent the head

"LUFF, SIR! LUFF, FOR GOD'S SAKE"

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of the yawl flying up into the wind almost before I had time to free the jib-sheet. Once, and only once, did our keel touch ground. It was a case of touch and go, however, and a big sigh of relief escaped the lips of the captain as we drew clear of the ugly cross-seas which were running over the sands, and once more entered the deeper water of the fairway.

Gilson, having almost run us on a lee-shore, was ordered, in no measured terms, to go forward and keep a look-out for the low-way buoy, which marks the entrance to Leigh swatchway.

The frost seemed to harden with the gale, and the decks, sails, and rigging were covered with ice. Indeed, no sooner did a shower of spray or rush of green water come in over the rail than it was immediately transformed into ice by the magic touch of the "Wizard of the North."

Suddenly a cry of "Luff, sir! luff, for God's sake!" came from the look-out man, and the next moment I caught a momentary glimpse of a huge buoy, which almost scraped the yacht's quarter as she luffed to avoid it.

"Thundering good thing Gilson sighted that chap in time, or hanged if we shouldn't have been smashed into matchwood," quietly remarked the captain as he brushed away sundry icicles from his moustache. "But," added he, "let go your jib-sheets, for *that* was the low-way buoy."

Round spun the gallant little ship, and twenty

minutes later she was lying snugly at anchor in Leigh swatchway. While we were furling the mainsail, several other craft came and took up their moorings in the sandbank sheltered channel, which, although the snow veiled them from sight, we judged to be Leigh bawleys, for at their advent the air became redolent of shrimps, sprats, and strange oaths.

A hurried snack, a glass of steaming grog, and with the riding light burning brightly on the forestay, all hands turned in shortly before midnight, to be lulled into peaceful sleep by the thunder of the waves breaking on the treacherous sands outside, and by the weird, wild music of the wind as it struck the frozen rigging of the ketch, and went howling and shrieking over the wide estuary.

Notwithstanding that both the captain and myself were somewhat slow in turning out of our warm berths next morning, we had breakfasted long before the majority of citizens were astir, and upon going into the well we found that the blizzard had taken its departure.

The wind was still blowing pretty hard from N.N.E., however, and the thermometer registered 19° of frost. Looking shoreward, an Arctic-like scene lay before us. As far as the eye could reach, the coastline was clothed in a mantle of virgin white, and the Kentish hills, although lying at least a dozen miles beyond the far-stretching marshes of Hoo and Grain, appeared to be but a very short distance across the grey, storm-tossed waters of the estuary.

It took all hands a good twenty-five minutes to clear the decks and well of snow and ice. The snow shovelling was warm and exhilarating work, and personally I rather enjoyed it; but when it came to getting in the anchor, unfurling frozen sails, and hauling on ice-sheathed halyards, it was quite a different story, and I suddenly remembered that the guns wanted a coat of vaseline to keep out the sea water. Having lent a hand on the peak-halyards, I went below to attend to the all-important matter of waterproofing the locks and barrels of the 8-bores and cripple-stoppers; an occupation I did not finish until the yacht was well under weigh and tearing along towards the North Sea, with a couple of reefs in her mainsail, and with her lee-rail just awash.

It was the captain's intention to sail down to the Blackwater, as that estuary was reported to be full of wildfowl; but there was such a heavy sea running outside the Mouse that a Trinity House yacht, which passed within hailing distance of the *Seamew*, made quite bad weather of it. He therefore decided to go about and run for Yantlett, which snug, albeit somewhat muddy, little haven, we reached, just in time to "save water in," dropping anchor off the coastguard cutter.

Leaving the captain aboard to prepare the midday meal (the "crew" had been sent ashore with a huge marketing basket), I took my old 12-bore and went ashore in the dinghy to see what I could pick up in the shape of fowl on the salt-marshes and foreshores. Should the owner of the neighbouring marshes happen to read

this sketch, I trust he will forgive me for having poached upon his manorial rights, for at the time of which I write I was under the impression that the saltings and foreshores in question were the property of the Crown.

I had almost forgotten to mention that before leaving the yacht I put on a white linen overall and a white serge cap, that I might appear as inconspicuous as possible in the snow. Scarcely had the nose of the dinghy touched the saltings than with a " scape-scape " a snipe rose from a small muddy runnel within five yards of me, and away he screwed to the marshes lying on the other side of the creek, unscathed, of course, for I was quite unprepared for him. Not a feather did I meet with upon the first stretch of salt-marshes, but, to my delight, when rounding the north-west point of those marshes known as the Isle of Grain, I saw a little company of between thirty and forty widgeon leisurely paddling into Yantlett Creek. Judging by the lay of the land and the slant of the wind, I guessed that the fowl would, if they were not disturbed, pass within shot of the saltings upon which I was walking; but I could see neither gut nor runnel of sufficient depth to afford me a " lay-up." The salt-marshes and surrounding country were, however, covered with snow, and clad as I was in the white overall, I hoped by lying at full length amongst the dead stalks of sea lavender to escape the notice of the ever-watchful and keen-sighted fowl.

Creeping on all fours, I managed to gain the edge of the saltings without accident, and having placed my gun

ready to handle at a moment's notice, I laid me down to await the advent of the widgeon. After what appeared to be a week's sojourn in the snow, I saw the birds enter the creek, and, as I imagined would be the case, they kept under the bank on my side of the same, it being well sheltered from the biting nor'-easter, and wild fowl hating to have their plumage ruffled by wind. Gradually the company approached nearer and nearer, and I began to think that I should get a couple of barrels into it, when suddenly the ugly bluff bows of a cockle-boat appeared round the point. The next moment up got the widgeon with a great to-do, and instead of bagging half-a-dozen, I had to content myself with a single bird, which dropped with a wing down to my second barrel as the company winged their way up the creek like a streak of lightning. To run to the dinghy and launch her was but the work of a very few minutes; but I had to expend a cartridge upon the widgeon to prevent him creeping into the harbourage afforded by the dense growth of saltwort and other salinacious herbage indigenous to the salt-marshes.

I had just taken the widgeon from the water when one of the crew of the cockle-boat shouted: "Look out, master!" Turning quickly to the rightabout I saw a single mallard flying down the creek at about forty yards' distance from me. Snatching up my gun, which was fortunately loaded in both barrels, I pulled, as I thought, well before the mallard, missed him clean with my right, and only succeeded in winging him with my left barrel:

and again a third cartridge had to be used upon a bird which ought easily to have been stopped at the first attempt.

As I was hauling the dinghy up on the salts again the captain hailed me to bring him ashore, and as I pulled alongside the *Seamew*, he said, "Hang the grub, M——, it must take care of itself. I cannot stand hearing you shoot while I am peeling Murphys and hacking up mutton in a stuffy cabin. I have banked up the fire and left the pot on the stove to simmer." I did not reply to my friend's speech, but made a pretty shrewd guess that the bottom of the saucepan would be burned out before we returned, hungry and tired: nor did I err in my conjecture.

Having rowed ashore, the captain and myself divided forces, he keeping to the creek, while I elected to try the northern shore of the Isle of Grain; and hard work it proved, walking in the teeth of a fierce nor'-easter. For perhaps an hour I did not fall in with fowl of any kind beyond an old sea-pie and a few small trips of dunlin which I did not deem worthy powder and shot. I had arrived almost at the extreme easterly point of the island when I sighted a small herd of curlew quartering a spit of ooze within 35 yards of the sea-wall, and perhaps 300 yards ahead of me. A low blackthorn bush grew on the side of the sea-wall at a point nearly opposite the spit of mud, and that bush I made my landmark.

Carefully crawling over the wall, I commenced to

stalk noiselessly over the snow until I reached the thorn-bush. Then came another climb up the face of the embankment, and the sleeves of my coat were very soon filled with frozen atoms. But what cared I providing I could get a shot into the long-billed fowl? After a good deal of slipping and slithering, my head was on a level with the growers of the bush. Pushing my gun very gingerly before me, I peered between the frozen blades of bent-grass, and to my joy discovered that three of the curlew were sitting so closely together that a single cartridge should have accounted for the leash. "Bang!" A couple drop with scarcely a quiver, and the third, sorely wounded, attempts to rise, but failing, tries to run seawards. He is too hard hit. As the remainder of the herd rise from the ooze I cover one and pull, but an ominous "click" tells of a missfire, and away string the curlew unscathed, and with almost as much noise as a herd of stampeding cattle.

Having gathered the slain from the almost knee-deep ooze, I sat for a short time under the leeward side of the sea-wall to eat a biscuit and cheese. While enjoying that frugal repast I heard the fanning sound of wings overhead, and looking upwards saw a big bunch of lap-wing heading inland.

The birds were flying at an altitude of at least eighty yards, but out of sheer "cussedness" I fired a couple of barrels at them, and to my surprise one of the plover doubled up to my first shot, and with a thud fell almost at my feet. Thoroughly satisfied with the morning's

sport, I retraced my footsteps towards Yantlett Creek, picking up a redshank on the way. This proved to be the last bird that day, for notwithstanding the fact that I waited up in a muddy gut for more than an hour, in the hope of obtaining a shot at curlew or other waders as they passed down the creek on their way to the mud-flats and mussel-banks lying outside, not even an oxbird came within range of my 12-bore, and I therefore returned to the *Seamew*, where I found the captain busily engaged frying bacon and eggs.

"How about the stew?" I asked.

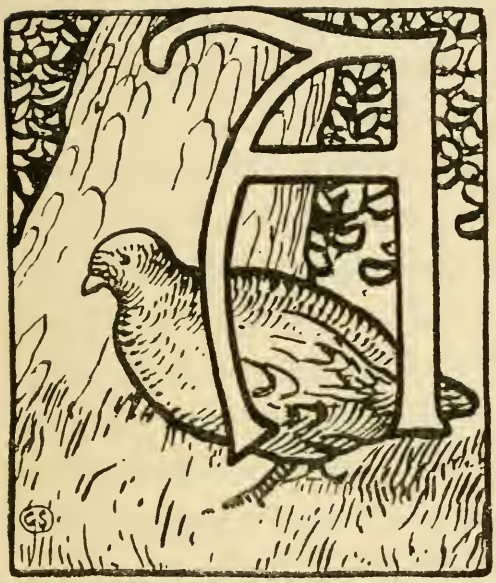
"Oh! I rather fancied bacon, and saved the stew for you; you will find it in the saucepan," replied my gallant and unselfish friend. I looked in the saucepan, and found the cremated remains of what was a few hours before an Irish stew, and I also had to fall back upon bacon and eggs.

"Well, you burned plenty of powder up the creek. What did you kill?" I next inquired of the captain, as he sat down to a huge gammon rasher and fried eggs.

"A pochard, a teal, and a redshank," was the reply.

Our total bag for the morning therefore consisted of a mallard, a widgeon, a pochard, a teal, three curlew, a peewit, and a couple of 'shanks.

THE QUAIL



ALTHOUGH widely distributed over the face of the world, the common quail (*Coturnix communis*) breeds so sparingly in the United Kingdom nowadays that the sportsman who finds a nest of this charming little game-bird on his manor watches and protects it with jealous care; while the flushing of a bevy of quail in September or October is an incident to be recorded on the pages of the shooting diary in red letters. And yet, at the latter part of the eighteenth century, so plentiful were these birds in our islands that great numbers were netted and hair-springed by fowlers. The following description, taken from the discoloured pages of an old manuscript, of the mode pursued by our forefathers in the capture of these toothsome morsels, may prove not uninteresting:—

"The quail is a well-known bird of passage, frequenting our cornfields in great numbers and sometimes the meadows. They begin to *sing* in the month of April, and make their

nests in May, building on the ground. Quails are to be taken by the call during their whole wooing-time, which lasts from April to August. The proper time for using the call is at sunrising, at nine o'clock in the morning, at three in the afternoon and at sunset, for these are the natural times of the quail's *singing*. The notes of the cock and hen quail are very different, and the fowler who expects to succeed in the taking of them must be expert in both, for when the cock calls the answer is to be made in the hen's note, and when the hen calls the answer is to be made in the cock's. By this means they will come up to the fowler, so that he may, with great ease, throw the net over and take them. If a cock quail be single, on hearing the hen's note he will immediately come, but if he have a hen already with him he will not forsake her. Sometimes, though only one quail answers to the call, there will be three or four come up, and then it is best to have patience and not run to take up the first, but stay till they are all entangled, as they soon will be. The quail is a neat, cleanly bird, and will not run much into dirty or wet places.

"On dewy mornings they will often fly instead of running to the call, and in this case it is better to let them go over the net if it so happens that they fly higher than its top, and the fowler then changing sides and calling again, the bird will come back and then will probably be taken in the net. The calls are to be made of a small leathern purse, about two fingers wide and four fingers long, and made in the shape of a pear; this is to be

stuffed half full of horsehair, and at the end of it is to be placed a small whistle made of the bone of a rabbit's leg, or some such bone—this is to be about two inches long and the end formed like flageolet, with a little soft wax. This is to be the end fastened into the purse, the other is to be closed up with the same wax, only that a hole is to be opened with a pin, to make it give a distinct and clear sound. To make this sound, it is to be held in the palm of the hand, with one of the fingers placed over the top of the wax ; then the purse is to be pressed, and the finger is to shake over the middle of it to modulate the sound it gives into a sort of shake. This is the most useful call, for it imitates the note of the hen quail, and seldom fails to bring a cock to the net, if there be one near the place. The call that imitates the note of the cock, and is used to bring the hen to him, is to be about four inches long, and about one inch thick. It is to be made of a piece of wire turned round and coiled, and covered with leather. One end must be closed with a piece of flat wood, about the middle of which there must be a small thread, or strap of leather, and at the other end the same sort of pipe made of bone as is used in the other call. The noise is made by opening and closing the spiral, and it gives the same sound that the cock does when he gives the hen a signal that he is near her."

By far the greater number of quail which find their way to the European markets are netted or snared on the

shores of the Mediterranean, and during the spring migration as many as 1,000,000 have been captured on the small island of Capri alone; while between 16,000 and 17,000 have been sold in Rome in a single day. Many quails remain to breed in the countries bordering the Mediterranean, but the majority pass to more northerly nesting places, and upon several occasions the eggs of this feathered cosmopolitan have been found in our islands as far north as Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. The quail taken during the spring migration are, from an epicurean point of view, not to be compared with those of the autumn, for at the fall of the year, when both grain and insect food are abundant, the birds are just as fat and juicy then as they are lean and dry during the earlier part of the year.

Season after season tens of thousands of these much-sought-after little game-birds find their way into Leadenhall and other great markets throughout the United Kingdom, and when imported alive they are closely packed in long, narrow and darkened crates (so pugnacious is the quail that to prevent him seeing and punishing his fellow-prisoners the crate is darkened with strips of felt or baize), troughs of millet and water being placed along the whole length of the crate in such a manner that the birds are able to feed at will. In spite of overcrowding, so plucky and hardy are they that the percentage of deaths among them during their long journey by crate, overland and across the sea, is comparatively small. It is also astonishing how quickly

they recuperate and regain their usual plumpness after the long and wearying flight of migration.

Although the quail is one of the most unsociable, and, as before mentioned, pugnacious of the great *gallinaceous* family, it would be hard to find a better or more patient mother than is the female. As an example of the close-sitting propensities of the bird, we remember having fed from the hand a hen quail as she sat on her nest of thirteen eggs, on the outskirts of a small covert near Sherborne in Dorsetshire. Within six weeks of leaving the shell the young ones are full grown. The cocks do not, however, assume their full mature plumage until the second year. In some parts of the country this bird is called by the bucolic ornithologist "wet-me-lips," on account of the strange three-syllabled call of the cock, which sounds not unlike "wet-me-lips." The first record of quail being eaten as food is given in Exodus. Biblical history does not, however, tell of the manner in which the Israelites dressed the game which flew to them so providentially and in such numbers. We know that the followers of Moses had neither vine leaves nor fat bacon within which to roll the dainty morsels before setting them down to roast; nor did they serve them on toast, for not a loaf of bread was to be bought in the camp for love or money. In Numbers we read that the Israelites "dried the quail round about the camp"; but then it is easy to imagine that even sun-dried quail would very soon pall on the appetite. In England the quail graces the table of the well-to-do classes only, for

it often commands almost its own weight in silver. Such, however, is not the case in more favoured parts of the globe, and in countries touching on the Mediterranean both rich and poor alike look forward to the spring and autumn visits of *la petite caille.*

CHRISTMAS ON THE VELDT

A FEW days before the Christmas of 190–, the thermometer registered something like 90 degrees in the shade, and there was at least one man of our "stag party" of four whose heart was in the beautiful West Country of Old England, where, as a guest at a certain ancient manor house situate among the tors and valleys of Exmoor, he had spent the preceding Yuletide.

"Hulloa, you chaps, what's up? You all look as miserable as so many lugged hares," was the respectful salutation of an irresponsible, devil-may-care youngster, known amongst his intimate friends as "Madcap Hood," who galloped up before the *stoep* of the bungalow whereon we were seated bored to death with the heat, and, incidentally, Jack Pearson's wonderful yarns of sport and adventure by land and flood—which years before we had heard, marked, learned, but not altogether digested—and smoking the blackest of black "Trichys," the latter almost powerful enough to

have driven a negro to suicide, or a liner 20 knots an hour.

"But buck up, boys," went on Hood, "I have chartered B.'s light waggon, and if you are agreeable we'll spend Christmas with old Jan V—— and his duck and coots. I won fifty of the best at the club last night and I am going to pay 'Sam' this journey." Having delivered his somewhat longwinded and decidedly disjointed harangue, Tommy Hood dismounted, and before I had time to "hold him up" he had commandeered and finished a deliciously cool peg of soda and whisky, which stood on the floor of the verandah within easy reach of my hammock-chair. He had sufficient grace, however, to toast "more power to my elbow" before returning the empty glass to me.

Now, to be perfectly candid, Madcap Hood's invitation came as a rift in the leaden clouds of despond, for a brace of us were awaiting remittances from home; the other two for their monthly "screw," and all four were, to speak in the vernacular, "on the rocks."

To overhaul our guns and shooting kits did not occupy very much time, and as the fiery sun began to dip towards the western skyline we "embarked" on our journey in the well-found shooting-waggon that was to convey us to our destination. The bungalow, which was known for miles round as "Bachelor's Hall," was left under the tender charge of our Zulu boy-of-all-work, Pete, and his black but comely wife, who officiated over the culinary department. Only those who have taken a

journey across the veldt by waggon or Cape cart under a cloudless moon and starlit sky can imagine the pleasure of such travelling, or the beauty assumed by the vast expanse of rolling plain under such conditions.

So light was the glorious night in question that one might easily have read a newspaper under the silvery beams cast by Queen Luna, and such weird and wondrous shapes did the rugged boulder-strewn kopjes take that it would have been very easy to imagine we had invaded a strange land inhabited by giants of enormous stature, and fearsome creatures of huge bulk and awful form. Through the night we *treked*, outspanning twice or thrice for an hour or so to rest the mules and to afford them the opportunity of a kick and a roll on the veldt: a species of exercise which appears to be as refreshing and invigorating to a tired mule or donkey as does a warm bath and a sleep to a travel-worn man.

Some of our party made a pretence of slumbering during the journey, but what with the jolting of the waggon over the nullah-crossed veldt-track, the yelling and cursing of the black driver at the waywardness of his stubborn team, and the snatches of song which the harmonious Hood indulged in at short intervals, I hae ma doots whether any one of us could honestly declare that he enjoyed five consecutive minutes of quiet and peaceful slumber. Be this as it may, I sat out the *trek*, owl-like, on the rack of the waggon, smoking, and drinking in the beauties of that glorious African night.

It was a good three hours before dawn when the

lumbering, travel-stained vehicle drew up before a long, white homestead. The house and its inmates were wrapped in slumber and darkness, and not the glimmer of a light was there to be seen through any of the windows of the rambling building.

"Let us serenade old Oom Jan. I'll take the solo part of *John Peel* and you fellows join in the chorus," said Hood, who, like many other human "ravens," seemed to imagine that his croaking rivalled the liquid melody of the nightingale. He lost no time in getting forrard with the grand old Cumbrian hunting song, and the dead silence of early morning was awakened by the most ear-splitting view-halloos and who-whooping that ever scared Jan V—— and his household from their peaceful slumbers.

Madcap Hood had just commenced the third verse of his serenade when the twinkle of a light was seen flitting from room to room like an imprisoned will-of-the-wisp. A few minutes later the front door of the homestead was flung violently open and our host, garbed in wonderful and fearful night attire, stood on the top step of the *stoep* and shouted in excellent English, "For Heaven's sake what is the matter; are you *all* daft or only topped up?"

Having satisfied Jan V—— that we were neither insane nor inebriated he led us into the house, where we found a substantial repast set out in the dining-room, and ample justice having been done to the good things of the supper—or rather breakfast-table—our worthy host

ushered us to our several sleeping apartments, which, unlike those of many a Boer household, were comfortably furnished and spotlessly clean.

It was past midday when a hideous Fingo brought a cup of coffee into my room, and from that dusky servitor I learned that my companions were still in bed. Very soon, however, the dulcet voice of Tommy Hood echoed through the house, and, looking out of the rose-festooned window of my room, I saw the harum-scarum youngster, clad in a gaudy sleeping suit, and with a towel bound round his head, turban fashion, astride one of the farmer's upstanding, unsaddled, Cape stallions, and galloping like a madman towards a small dam of water which lay about half-a-mile distant from the homestead. Madcap Hood was off to make his matutinal ablution. Upon entering the dining-room, I found my host and his three buxom daughters awaiting the appearance of their somewhat tardy guests at the breakfast-table. The remainder of the party came in one by one, the last being Hood, who, in spite of his statement to the effect that he found more mud than water in his bathing place, looked as though he had emerged from the proverbial bandbox.

During the progress of the meal, the plans for the afternoon's programme were discussed. V—— suggested that, the day being short, a coot drive would be a good scheme. "There is a large pan of water within half-an-hour's drive, and we ought to get a fair number of duck, besides a good bag of old bald-heads" (coots),

said the farmer between the puffs which he took at a great Dutch china pipe, the bowl of which held not much less than half-an-ounce of Boer tobacco.

The proposed coot drive agreed upon *nem. con.*, away we started for the pan of water in a Cape cart and a four-seated "spider," a small regiment of Kaffir beaters bringing up the rear at the "double," whooping and yelling as they ran like so many devils incarnate, or Donnybrook roysterers.

While driving across the veldt a rather extraordinary incident happened. A single red-winged francolin got up from almost under the fore-hoof of the leaders of the Cape cart team, and Jan V——, in making a cut at the bird with his long raw-hide whip, brought it down with a broken neck as cleanly as though it had been shot.

At length, after some thirty minutes' drive, we arrived on the shore of a large reed-fringed piece of water upon which were to be seen several heavy "paddlings" of different kinds of wild duck, while a great colony, numbering some thousands of coots, had taken possession of one end of the lagoon. At a single glance, it was evident to me that five times the number of our small party of guns would not have proved too many to have made a really successful drive of the pan.

Former experiences having taught us that native beaters cannot or *will* not refrain from making a hulla-baloo when engaged in hunting of any description, unless they be led by a white man, Hood, being the youngster of the party, was told off to conduct the drive; but he

appeared to resent the short lecture that was preached to him regarding the desirability of his taking high-flying birds only, unless he was desirous of "bagging" a man or two. How necessary that lecture was will presently be shown.

The preliminaries settled, off marched Hood at the head of his tattered mob of chattering Kaffirs, while the rest of us took up our stands in the high reeds growing round the shores of the water, which afforded excellent cover; but which were sufficiently open to permit the guns to see all that was going on in front of them.

We had not long to wait ere a ringing view-halloo from Hood warned us that the drive had commenced, and, needless to add, that infernal halloo set the Kaffirs yelling and whooping like so many fiends let loose from Hades. A skein of some ten or twelve spur-winged geese were first set a-wing, and passing H—— left-handed and within easy range, a couple of their number fell with resounding splashes into the shallow—an excellent right and left for a start.

The rest of the geese, wheeling quickly to the right-about, broke back over the heads of the beaters. Then came duck and pink-billed teal in both large and small bunches, and pretty heavy toll was taken of those which fled within range, by every gun with the exception of my own, the powder in which, I am bound to confess, was anything but straight. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, a sharp report from the front was followed by a smart and unpleasant patter of shot pellets

against the reeds which formed my natural "blind." Then I knew that in spite of our lecture regarding high shots Madcap Hood had pulled at a low-flying bird, for the pellets travelled at too great a racket for falling shot.

The intolerable row made by Hood and his beaters was so great, however, that it would have been quite useless attempting to warn the first named against saluting my fellow guns or myself with a fresh discharge of No. 5 "chilled"; and besides, the coots were beginning to move.

It was not without a feeling of uneasiness, however, that I watched the progress of the beaters and the movements of the dusky fowl, for, as every shooting man knows, a stray shot pellet, even when fired at a couple of hundred yards' range, may ruin the sight of an eye for ever.

At length the first bunch of coots rose, and with a smart breeze behind them the birds passed between H—— and myself at a great pace, affording rattling sporting shots. Holding, as I imagined, well on to a single bird flying a little outside the "bunch," I pulled, and had the somewhat unsatisfactory satisfaction of seeing him go on his way unscathed, while one of his bald-headed fellows—at which, by the way, I had not even thrown a glance—doubled up like a black glove to the contents of my right barrel. A second coot, with a wing down, dropped to my left and then ran into a dense clump of sedges, from which haven of refuge, to the best of my belief, he was never gathered. I had no

leisure to watch how the man on my right fared, as the air seemed alive with coots, and for several minutes the "pop-popping" of "nitro" and "black" on both sides of my stand was quite incessant, while the yelling of the beaters was almost unearthly. Coots in their tens and their hundreds came past and over me, until from continuous firing the barrels of my old 12-bore became so heated that I could scarcely hold them.

Briefly, I obtained my full share of shooting during that really exciting Christmas coot drive; but I am bound to confess that my contribution to the aggregate bag, which consisted of nearly 150 couple of coots and some 20 brace of ducks and teal, was far less than that of either of my fellow guns, with the exception of Madcap Hood, who only accounted for an ancient hammerkop during the drive.

NEW YEAR ON THE VELDT

I WAS lying in my hammock watching from the open window of my bungalow the birth of a golden dawn—the dawn of the New Year of 1895—when the rumble of wheels and the clatter of hoofs on the dusty, sunbaked veldt road came to my ears. As a considerable amount of traffic in the shape of transport waggons, mining material, and so forth, passed along the road, upon which abutted my four-roomed "mansion," I paid but little heed to the approaching waggon. But when the lumbering vehicle pulled up before my modest abode and a volley of ear-splitting and unmistakably British "who-whoops" awakened the dead silence of early morning, I thought it was about time to "get a move on" and investigate from the *stoep*. Thanks to that benefactor to mankind, the inventor of pyjamas, all I had to do was to slip my somewhat abnormal feet into a pair of *veldtschoons* and shuffle out on to the *stoep* to find my three friends, R——, B——, and S——, perched like a leash of amiable

baboons on the side racks of a light buck-waggon, which was drawn by a span of ten fast and good-looking Argentine mules.

"Get that old blunderbuss of yours and jump aboard. We're off to de V——'s farm for a couple of days' shooting. Boss up, old chap, we can't wait more than a couple of minutes," cried B——, as though it were quite the usual thing for a man to start away on a shooting trip at a moment's notice habited in airy night garments of the thinnest of China silk. A couple of days' shooting was not to be missed, however, and having dressed with almost as much alacrity as a quick-change artiste, I put my old 12-bore gun into a much-worn leg-o'-mutton case, filled a capacious magazine with cartridges; explained to my Basuto boy-of-all-work the difference between *meum et tuum* (I was anxious regarding the fate of my small stock of "medical comforts" during my absence), clambered into the waggon, and away started our cavalcade at a smart trot: the yelling of the noisy but skilful Kaffir driver and the loud pistol-like crack of the enormously long raw-hide whip making more disturbance than a whole troop of Cossacks.

We had a *trek* of several hours before us, and leaving Johannesburg and its dust and turmoil, its mines and head-gears, behind us, we set our course eastward along what was formerly known, I believe, as the Natal coach road. We noticed a fine string of racehorses at their morning work on the veldt at Rosettenville, and having made a brief halt at the hotel for a glass of

"fortified milk," we pushed on again. Shortly after leaving Rosettenville we entered into one of the most picturesque and pleasant parts of the way: a deep and beautifully wooded valley, known as the Eagle's Kloof from the number of *aasvogels* (Egyptian vultures) which inhabit the steep and rugged cliffs flanking the right-hand side of the valley. Nestling in this smiling oasis was the former home of a certain well-known landdrost, who, in his official capacity under President Kruger, proved very hostile towards the members of the Reform Committee of 1895. Within a short distance of this gentleman's house ran a charming little brook, the surface of which was carpeted with beautiful eucharist and purple water-lilies; its banks being fringed with drooping willows, feathery tree-ferns, scarlet gladioli, and a hundred other varieties of trees, ferns, and gorgeously tinted blossoms, many of which were new to me. Briefly, Eagle's Kloof was a very delightful spot, and notwithstanding such exotics as tree-ferns, eucharist lilies, and other plants which are found growing only under glass in the Old Country, one might easily have imagined oneself to be travelling through some Devon or Cornish valley.

But we have dwelt upon this verdant spot too long. It is time to continue on our trek towards de V——'s farm. Shortly after ten o'clock we outspanned on the banks of a spruit for breakfast, and to give the mules a handful of mealies, a mouthful of water, and a roll on the veldt. We were by this time a good sixteen miles distant from

Johannesburg, and beyond a few isolated farms and an occasional roadside store or drinking saloon, we seemed far enough away from bricks and mortar, or, rather, corrugated iron and *darga*. Very little time was spent over the *al fresco* meal that we were pleased to call breakfast; the mules were inspanned, and away we went again, jolting and bumping over the nullah-crossed, boulder-strewn highway.

Every here and there a *paauw*, or *korhaan*, was sighted in the distance, and more than one covey of francolin either rose or ran over the veldt well within shot of the waggon. The greater part of the veldt was beaconed out into farms, much being enclosed within barbed wire; and not wishing to come to loggerheads with the owners of the land, who were mostly Dutchmen, we agreed not to pull trigger until arriving at our destination.

The last portion of the *trek*, which led across a vast expanse of treeless kopje-flanked veldt, proved uninteresting enough, and our little party was not sorry when a glimpse of de V——'s low but picturesque white homestead, standing amidst emerald fields of growing wheat, barley, and mealies, was caught.

A venerable-looking patriarch was Jan de V——, standing well over six feet in his stockings, and with a long white flowing beard that almost covered his broad and powerful chest. Unlike many of his brethren, de V—— was a well-educated and courtly old gentleman; and although his travels had taken him no farther than Cape Town, he had read deeply, and was very well versed in European

politics. Whatever failings the Boers may possess, inhospitality is not one of them; and upon entering the big living room of Oom Jan's homestead, we found an excellent repast waiting to be "wolfed" by our hungry party. High-tea, or whatever the meal might be termed, was not finished until the fiery red sun had begun to sink behind a low range of brown kopjes; and while S—— and myself settled down into the comfortable depths of a couple of Madeira chairs for a long chat and a longer smoke with our host, the other men took their guns to try and get a stray shot before darkness set in.

De V—— was reciting his experiences as a sportsman, in the days when vast herds of antelope used to roam unmolested over the very spot upon which Johannesburg and its suburbs now stand, when the faint and distant report of four barrels came to our ears, followed by the sound of more shots. Half-an-hour later our friends returned with a magnificent specimen of a spur-wing gander and a couple of black-winged stilts, which they had shot on a swampy bit of veldt lying about a mile distant from the homestead. Both confessed to having shot very badly, and admitted that their bag ought to have been as heavy again.

As an early start was to be made the next morning, neither of us dwelt long over our host's excellent old Montague dop and Magaliesburg tobacco after supper; and it wanted a good hour to sunrise when a crooning-voiced Kaffir brought a cup of coffee into my bedroom,

with the news that Baas Vilgee was awaiting breakfast. De V—— was a widower, having lost his wife many years, and as his house was not graced by the presence of the fair sex, we formed what our American cousins would call a "stag party." An appetising breakfast of tender *blesbok* cutlets, green mealies and coffee, having been done ample justice to, some twelve or fifteen native farm hands were recruited from mealy field and stables to act as beaters, and away started the guns towards a small lagoon or pan of water about a mile distant; the intervening veldt being interspersed with patches of rank waist-high grass and sage. As the latter looked very likely ground for francolin, quail, and hares, we agreed to walk through it in line, and we had not been on the move a couple of minutes when a covey of seven francolin rose between de V—— and S——. The birds offered S—— a very easy crossing shot, but he "muffed" with both barrels, and it was a "feather for the cap" of the old Boer when he "wiped the eye" of the rooinek by dropping a brace of francolin with a very long "right and left." The remaining five birds, after flying straight away for a couple of hundred yards or so, suddenly swung round left-handed and were soon lost to sight behind a belt of low thorn scrub. A hare was next set afoot by the beater on my right, and although the tips of her ears alone showed above the rank herbage, I managed to bowl her over at my first attempt. Then, for some little time, nothing wearing feather or fur was moved. Suddenly, however, a wild yell from the

blubber lips of the ebon beaters rent the air, and although personally I could see nothing—owing to the density of the cover through which we were beating—a dose of No. 3's from R——'s 10-bore laid low a fine *steinbok*, much to the delight of the youngster who killed it. It was his first buck.

With the exception of a brace of black *korhaan* which rose far out of shot of everyone, nothing further was flushed until the pan was reached, which, upon being driven, yielded a goodly contribution to the bag in the shape of duck, pink-bill teal, coot, black-quilled and painted snipe; the latter being shot along the spongy shores of the little lagoon.

A description of the manner in which every individual bird was killed—or missed—would prove but monotonous reading. Suffice to say we enjoyed very fair sport amongst the feather and fur of the veldt on that sunny New Year's morning.

WITH ROD AND CREEL IN NATAL

Y FRIEND B. and myself mounted our ponies one glorious morning, and started away at a canter to ride the nine miles which lay between Maritzburg and Herr von S——'s picturesque country bungalow.

The bungalow was situate on the banks of a charming little stream inhabited not only by yellow and other kinds of coarse fish indigenous to South African rivers and streams, but some goodly rainbow trout also, the latter having been turned down by Herr von S—— three years before our first visit to the stream.

A portion of the way led through a beautiful little valley, amongst the towering, boulder-strewn kopjes. Gorgeously-plumaged birds, alarmed at our sudden appearance, flitted from bush to bush, chattering and scolding as they went, while curious grunt-like sounds, which came to our ears from amidst the huge boulders of the hills, warned us that we had intruded into the sanctuary of a troop of baboons. A tiny rivulet, limpid

as crystal, wound its serpentine course through beds of azure-blue lobelia, and clumps of flowering shrubs and thorn-bush. Feathery tree-ferns and graceful willows fringed the banks of the little brook, and in parts its rippleless surface was simply carpeted with eucharist and purple water-lilies. Many other kinds of brilliantly tinted blossoms adorned the oozy shores of this mountain stream, while maidenhair ferns, scarlet and variegated gladioli, bright blue moon-daisies and a hundred different species of hill-loving plants, many of which were unfamiliar to us, peeped out from the nooks and crannies of the towering heights above us.

So peacefully beautiful was this little kloof among the kopjes that a feeling akin to sadness crept over me as once more the far-reaching waste of barren, treeless veldt opened out before my eyes—that feeling of sadness one experiences upon awakening from a pleasant dream to the sordid realities of everyday life.

Upon reaching the high veldt we put our ponies into a smart gallop, and very soon arrived at Herr von S——'s charming, rose-covered bungalow.

Greatly to our disappointment we found that our host had been summoned by wire to Durban a few hours before our arrival. He had, however, been thoughtful of our welfare, and his kindly old German housekeeper, Frau Gertrude, served us with a most appetising little *Zweites frustuck* (second breakfast) on the blossom-festooned *stoep*, with the river babbling at our feet.

Breakfast finished, the light 10-foot "Hardy's"

were put together, and having arranged to meet at the bungalow at midday, my companion and I parted, he going up, while I elected to try my luck down stream.

There was no lack of insect life on the river, and having noticed a number of small fish rising to a fly resembling a blue dun, I turned over the time-discoloured parchment leaves of my dear old fly-book until I came to a bunch of small and beautifully tied "blue duns," one of which I selected and attached to the finest drawn cast I could find amongst my tackle. There was just sufficient ripple on the water to lend a well-thrown dry-fly a very lively appearance.

My first cast, however, was about as clumsily managed as possible; but in spite of the fly having fallen "all of a heap," it was taken instantly by a plucky little 4-ounce "rainbow," which jumped high out of the water when he felt the "steel," and fought as gallantly as many a trout of twice his weight which I have caught in English trout streams. At length I had him safely in the landing-net, and a brilliantly marked little fellow he was. Elated with the success of my first cast, I carefully fished every foot of water running between my starting place and a belt of willows growing about a quarter of a mile lower down the reach. For some little time, however, I failed to rise a fish of any kind, and was in the act of reeling in my line preparatory to looking for a fresh run beyond the willows, when the swirl of a heavy fish travelling in the direction of my fly attracted my attention. The next moment the artificial dun was sucked be-

neath the surface. It was quite unnecessary for me to strike, as the fish had hooked himself hard and fast. Up and down stream and across and across he rushed, with all the gameness of a Dee grilse. Suddenly, however, to my unspeakable disgust, "bang" went the trace, and at the loose end of it what I honestly believed to be a good 2-lb. trout. (It's always the heaviest fish of the day that get away.) It was useless crying over a spilt trout, however; and, having rigged up a fresh trace, I started off to try my fortune farther down the stream.

Once clear of the willows, I had a fine stretch of open water before me, and in some parts the river widened out to quite forty feet. By this time it was nearly twelve o'clock, and the sun blazingly hot, but, thanks to a cool south-westerly breeze, I was able to continue on my beat in comparative comfort. There were now but very few fish rising, and for perhaps three quarters of an hour I did not get a touch of any kind. While throwing under the farther bank, however, my fly was taken greedily, and in a moment I knew that I was into something heavy.

"There's no trout about that gentleman," was my inward ejaculation, as the fish, after making a sluggish move upstream, caved in like a lamb, allowing me to reel him into the bank without a struggle. I was right in my surmise, for my capture proved to be a barbar of 3½ lb. weight. I continued fishing steadily and carefully downstream, picking up a leash of small trout as I went.

Neither exceeded three ounces, and somewhat tired of catching and returning such pigmies, I determined

to fish back to the starting point. At the last cast, however, my fly was taken like lightning, and as I struck, a beautiful fish leapt high out of the water; and had I not dropped the point of my rod as he fell back I should in all probability have been "smashed." For fully ten minutes did that speckled beauty fight manfully for his freedom, and during the mad rushes he made I quite expected to see him carry away my fine-drawn cast into his sanctuary amongst a cluster of big boulders. At length, thoroughly spent, he allowed himself to be drawn over the landing-net.

Two pounds and as many ounces did that game trout weigh; and a more beautifully proportioned or more brilliantly marked "rainbow" I never hope to grass again.

A few more unsuccessful casts over the pool in which I rose the last fish, and I retraced my footsteps to the bungalow, where I found B—— awaiting my advent.

On comparing notes, I discovered that my friend's creel contained a brace more trout than did my own.

Nevertheless, my two-pounder proved the show-fish of the morning.

FRANCOLIN AND FLIGHT SHOOTING

'WAS during my first visit to Johannesburg that E——, who held the appointment of Chief Engineer on one of the East Rand mining estates, invited me to make one of a party of six guns, who were to spend the opening days of the then rapidly approaching shooting season among the feather and fur of a certain game preserve situate between the Golden City and Potchefstroom, and about two days' mule waggon journey from the former town.

Having nothing of importance to keep me in Johannesburg, I simply "jumped" at the invitation, and one glorious morning in early March (it must be remembered that the shooting season in the Transvaal commences with the closing of the same in England), just as the first golden spears of dawn were beginning to gild the crests of a low line of rocky kopjes which stretched away above the eastern horizon as far as the eye could reach, I found myself seated with my fellow-gunners in a comfortable

shooting waggon, which was fitted out with the complete paraphernalia for a shooting trip, and drawn by a span of right good Argentine mules. A team of handsome liver and white pointers accompanied the expedition, and, of course, the usual Kaffir driver and servants.

We soon drew clear of the town, and, "encouraged" by an occasional sounding cut from the huge raw-hide whip—which only the Boer or native driver knows how to handle properly—together with volleys of unearthly yells from Mamba, our Basuto driver, the mules set forward at a slapping pace ; and after one or two stoppages to water the animals we outspanned at Krugersdorp, the scene of Dr Jim's surrender. In the cool of the evening, after a halt of some four hours' duration, we inspanned the mules again, and *treked* on towards our shooting grounds, which were reached about noon the following day, without any event worthy of mention having been met with on the way.

The spot chosen for our camp was on the banks of a small klip-river, the name of which has escaped my memory ; but I was told it was a tributary of the Vaal. Towering above the stream, and stretching away to the southward until lost below the skyline, was a long range of boulder-strewn hills known as Gatt's Rand, while about two miles distant from our outspan was a small lagoon of about sixty acres, which shimmered under the rays of the fierce sun like a jewel set in an endless expanse of brown, burned-up, level waste. As every traveller knows, there are a hundred and one things to be done when

pitching or striking camp—animals to be watered, fed, and knee-haltered, fuel to be cut or gathered, bedding to be got out, water to be found and carried, and food to be prepared for the hungry wayfarers. Each man of our little party drew lots to decide what particular task he was to perform. "Fuel" fell to E——, "water" to another man, while on the slip of paper that I drew was written the word, "cook."

Now Jacob, E——'s huge Zulu servant, was an excellent cook (for a native), but he had been sent to the store, some five miles away, to purchase certain necessaries which we had forgotten to procure in Johannesburg, and I was therefore told off to act the part of *chef* during his absence. But I am rather a "dab hand" at camp cooking, and when the fuel-man brought in sufficient material from which to start a blaze, I soon had the big three-legged iron pot simmering over the fire. In due course tiffin was announced, and judging from the fact that only a few mutton bones remained in the pot at the finish of the repast, my "Irish" stew was fully appreciated.

Tiffin finished, one pipe of "Pioneer" and one "tot" of Scotch whisky were allowed; and then a general move was made towards a big patch of rough grass lying about a mile away from the camp, for we had elected to try this cover for francolin and korhaan.

We had not entered the grass many minutes ere we discovered that E——'s pointers were utterly useless, and had evidently never been worked or shot over.

E—— bought them from a man (shortly after the deal he left Johannesburg for Rhodesia) as being thoroughly broken, and paid a long price for the team of good-looking but worthless brutes. The dogs were, therefore, sent back to camp under the care of one of the boys.

There were some six hundred morgen of this rough cover, which in parts grew well above one's waist; and we worked it in line, one gun (B——) walking on the left flank just outside the grass, which was almost square in formation; E—— being the middle, and myself right-hand gun; the other three men being sandwiched between. We had not started forward many minutes when a hare got up close to my feet and broke back past the line of guns. But so dense was the cover in that particular part that in a moment she was lost to view, and it was not until Mistress *Lepus* gained the more open veldt that I bowled her over with a dose of No. 5's.

Next, a covey of six red wings (francolin) rose close to E——, who scored a right and left to his credit. The remainder of the covey then flew left-handed, and S——, who was next gun to E——, muffed horribly with his first, but dropped a bird with his second barrel, which was probably a "runner," for it was never gathered: and the want of a good dog was now felt.

The remaining leash of red wings "ran the gauntlet" of De V—— and B——, both of whom loosed off a couple of barrels at them; but the birds were practically out of shot and got away to a quieter harbourage unscathed.

The red-winged "partridge," or rather francolin of South Africa, is a fine bird, and when once fairly on the wing he takes almost as much stopping as the "little brown bird" at home. But, like his French cousin, he is an equally good sprinter, and even in scanty cover I have seen these birds run quite a long distance with a dog close on their heels. And so was it on this particular afternoon, for although plenty of francolin were flushed in the long grass, they would, in the majority of cases, run until well out of shot; then get up and drop again in another part of the cover. Consequently the bag, when counted at the close of the third and last beat, was found to contain but $5\frac{1}{2}$ brace of "red wings," a korhaan, and a leash of hares.

The last bit of grass-cover having been beaten out, a move was made towards the little lagoon mentioned earlier herein; for the sinking of the sun towards the western horizon told us that ere long the evening flight of the fowl would begin, and a small "gaggle" of spur-wing geese circling the water proclaimed that the pan was not uninhabited. Indeed, upon every little pool of water in South Africa wildfowl of many kinds will nearly always be found.

A quarter of an hour's walking brought us to some huge outcrops, which lay but a few hundred yards from the northern shore of the lagoon, where E—— said he had enjoyed some good flight shooting the preceding season.

Each man took up a position behind one of the out-

crops to await the advent of the fowl; I myself choosing a big boulder which stood at some little distance from the main group of outcrops.

From my "blind" I could see, with the assistance of a powerful pair of binoculars, a heavy paddling of grey duck and pink-bill teal preening their feathers round the shores of the lake. The centre of the water had been taken possession of by the gaggle of spur-wings we had already noticed circling the pan, and the "glucking" of the fowl as they tore up the long grasslike weeds from the oozy bottom was plainly heard from my stand.

Flitting about on the shallows were to be seen numerous flocks of different species of waders, both large and small, while standing at intervals along the shores were sentinel-like herons and crowned and Kaffir cranes, feeding upon the small fish, lizards, and frogs which abound in most of these veldt-locked pieces of water.

But the fiery sun is rapidly disappearing, and I must be on the alert, for soon the evening flight of the fowl to and from the neighbouring pools and pans will commence. Even as the thought passes through my mind I espy a bunch of teal heading straight for my "blind." But, as the little duck approach almost to within shot, the man on my left lifts his gun, and to my disgust they turn off left-handed and are soon out of danger of my 12-bore.

A few moments later some ten or twelve grey duck pass between De V—— and B——, who are stationed at some little distance from me. Four barrels ring out

in quick succession, and three ducks double up instanter. The rest of the bunch wheel, and come past my stand at a tremendous pace. I make a shocking miss with the first barrel, but manage to cut down a duck flying a little apart from his brethren with the second, and have barely time to ram home a couple of fresh cartridges when a heavy " spring " of teal pass clean over my head, and so closely are they packed that four drop to my double discharge.

The air is now fairly alive with fowl, for the reports of our guns have disturbed the feathered inhabitants of the lake, and they appear to be utterly demoralised. For a few minutes duck, teal, and coot wheel round and round the " blinds," and during that short African twilight my fellow-gunners and myself get as much shooting as even the greediest gunner could wish for. But it rapidly grows too dark to distinguish objects moving at even twenty yards distant, and gathering the slain we set off on a bee-line towards camp, guided thither by the cow-dung fire which gleams cheerfully through the fast-gathering darkness.

UNDER THE KENT HILLS

HERE are no barn-door pheasants on D——'s little manor at the foot of the Kentish hills. A few brace of wild birds are always to be found in the copses, spinneys, and high double hedge-rows which abound on the property, however, while a very fair bag of partridges, hares, and rabbits, with an occasional mallard, teal, or snipe, gleaned from the banks of the sedge and ozier-fringed river which forms a curved boundary round two sides of the place, thrown in, is generally obtainable.

It was a delightful November morning, as I drove along the three miles of bracken-fringed, leaf-strewn high-way which led from the "one hoss" little railway station of Y——, and wound in and out amongst dis-mantled hop gardens, orchards, woods and copses, until it took me to the lodge gates of my friend's picturesque Georgian manor house.

D—— and my fellow-guests were awaiting my arrival, and, ample justice having been done to the

good things of the breakfast table, we started off to slay.

The single-handed keeper, accompanied by half-a-score bronzed and grinning yokels, who were to act as beaters and game carriers, and a team of handsome and well-broken field spaniels, was waiting for the appearance of the guns at the gate of the first enclosure to be worked —a big field of rough grass, which almost invariably held its full complement of partridges, hares, and rabbits.

First blood fell to the lot of D——, who rolled over a well-grown leveret just as she was disappearing into a thick belt of bramble scrub growing on the banks of a small brook or feeder of the river. At the report of D——'s gun, a covey of seven partridges rose wild and far out of shot of either of us. Then a second and bigger lot got up at a greater distance still, and I, for one, began to think that driving would have been by far the most satisfactory manner of dealing with the little brown birds, notwithstanding the keeper's avouchment of "ne'er a partridge hevin' been pulled at during the whole of the season."

My position of outside left-hand gun led me past a small pond-hole, from which, with a great to-do, four teal sprang within a dozen yards of me, and away they flashed, twisting and turning in their flight as only these merry little duck know how to twist and turn. Holding, as I believed, well before one of the teal as it passed left-handed, I pulled, but, apparently, missed clean, and only succeeded in stopping one of the "spring" with a wing

down. The gun on my left—the local *medico*—did better, however, for, as the remaining leash swung by him at a great speed, he dropped a couple of them dead as stones, leaving but a solitary bird to seek a quieter haven of refuge amongst the reeds and sedges of the neighbouring river.

A single peewit, probably a pricked bird, suddenly tumbled out of a clump of rank bent-grass, from almost under old Rake's nose. A sharp report from the gun of the centre man, and the beautiful bird's flight was stopped for ever. The remaining three beats over, the big grass field yielded but four rabbits and a hare, the latter being retrieved from a tumble-down hopper's hut wherein she had taken shelter with a broken leg.

A move was now made to an outlying belt of spinney, which, owing to its isolated situation, D—— was anxious to beat before shooting the more important coverts. The little brook mentioned earlier herein flowed along one side of this spinney, and I was told off to keep line with the beaters and to stop any pheasants which might happen to fly that way; while D—— and C—— took up their stands at the far end of the copse.

The beaters start forward, under the leadership of the keeper, tapping with their sticks the young chestnut saplings and under-covert as they go. A loud "whirr" puts me on the *qui vive*, and the next moment a splendid old dark-necked cock pheasant flashes through the scant russet, gold, and crimson-tinted foliage; and away over my head he flies, every metallic feather on his

handsome body glinting gloriously under the bright rays of the morning sun. He offers an easy shot, however, and a dose of No. 6 from my right barrel sends him crashing into a bed of wild iris.

"Mark cock!" again greets my ears, but the yokels' "cock" proves to be a young hen pheasant in very immature plumage. "Spare the hens" is, of course, the order of the day, and the little lady is allowed to go on her way unscathed. The doctor is now busy; but whether that double report means a successful "right and left," a "muff" with the first barrel and a kill with the second, or a clean miss with both, I am unable to say. A coal-black rabbit now comes sneaking through the bramble bushes, which grow down to the very brink of the stream. His big eyes have "twigged" me, however, and ere I can raise my gun he is in the thorny brake again; and, doubtless succeeds in doubling back behind the line of beaters, as the bunnies found amongst the slain when the drive is over are all of the common grey colour.

An occasional shot fired at the farther end of the spinney tells one that the guns placed there are getting sport of some kind, but, with the exception of a big tabby "varmint" of a cat, whose poaching proclivities are promptly put an end to with a dose of lead, nothing wearing either feather or fur comes my way.

A few minutes later "All out!" is called, the result of the beat being four pheasants, two hares, one wood-pigeon, seven rabbits, and last, but by no means least, a four-footed poacher.

The next two hours were spent in walking up—or, rather, in attempting to walk up—partridges on grass, plough, fallow, and roots, but so wild were the birds that only 5½ brace were added to the bag. True, a good number of hares were set afoot, but, D—— being a staunch supporter and follower of the local pack of harriers, these were left to be hunted by the "currant jelly dogs."

At one o'clock a halt was called for luncheon in a delightfully wooded spot on the banks of the river. During the progress of the *al fresco* meal, a beautifully marked trout, of at least 3 lb. weight, came up within a few inches of the surface of a deep, boulder-strewn pool. H——, who is an ardent disciple of old Izaak, declared that he would rather have killed that speckled "leviathan" with an artificial fly than all the pheasants in Kent with powder and shot.

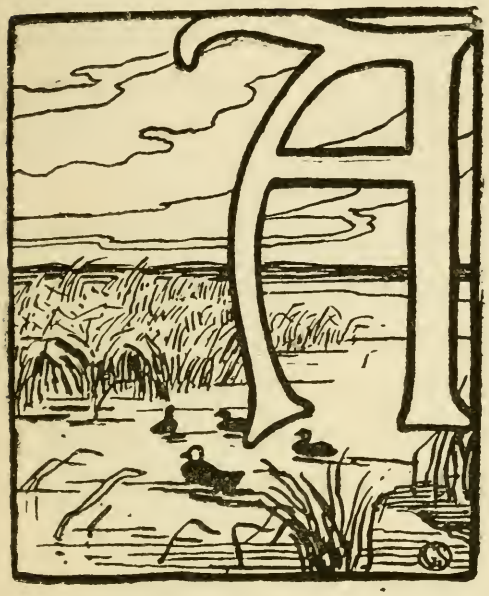
"You might just as well throw your cap at him as a fly," replied D——. "I have tried the wily old brute with every pattern of fly and kind of bait under the sun for the last ten years, but devil a rise or run did I ever get from him. One of the village lads got hold of him once with a bit of bread and an eel-hook, but when the youngster tried to haul the prize out stickleback fashion, his bamboo rod was smashed, lock, stock, and barrel."

A few red worms were dug out of the light soil and cast to the speckled giant, who, having condescended to take a dozen or so of the toothsome morsels into his capacious mouth, sank from view

into the black depths of the pool. May he long escape the net of the prowling poacher and the sharp tusks of the otters which inhabit his native stream in some numbers.

Our attention was next turned to the high double hedgerows, clumps of covert, and strips of spinney, which remained unshot, when, notwithstanding that there were no "warm corners," some very pretty sport was obtained. A description of how the doctor and myself worked the hedgerows, while D—— and H—— acted as stops in gateways and other convenient hiding-places along the "doubles"; how this long-tail was killed; how that one missed; how we succeeded in driving many of the outlying pheasants into the ten-acre covert; how one of the beaters was found with the tail-feathers of a fine young cock sticking out of the big pocket of his fustian jacket, which, "without a word of a loie, he wor a-going to take to a sick friend" (probably the village publican) "to make a mess o' soup for 'un—poore chap"—would prove monotonous reading. Suffice it to say that every man of us enjoyed that impromptu day's sport under the beautiful hills of Kent. To the jovial doctor's last shot fell the *rara avis* of the day, in the shape of a woodcock, which was flushed by one of the dogs from a clump of holly bushes growing on the outskirts of a little copse.

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING ON THE MARSHES



ROUGH shooting of 2200 acres, all told, some two-thirds of which consist of dyke and fleet intersected marshes, is not a manor about which one can boast very much perhaps. Nevertheless, my three shooting partners and myself manage not only to obtain many an enjoyable day's sport thereon, but some very pretty little mixed bags to boot, including partridges, duck, snipe, hares, rabbits (a few), and "various"; an occasional rare species of duck or wader being included under the latter heading.

For upwards of ten seasons have we hired our little manor at a rental, which, to those readers who rent a large and well-stocked partridge manor, would doubtless appear absurdly small. True, the place lies "seven miles from anywhere," and the accommodation at the marshland homestead cannot by any stretch of imagination be described as palatial. But then, of what moment are such details to men in the prime of life, who have

"roughed it" in as many corners of the earth as there are points on a mariner's compass? And what softer or sweeter bed can be found after a hard day's sport than a blanket-covered truss of deliciously scented hay, laid smoothly in a snug corner of the wainscotted sitting-room of an old-time farmhouse? I fancy I can see a cynical smile break o'er the face of many of my readers as they peruse this, and to such I would say:

"Give the hay-couch a trial after a long and tiring day's marshland shooting in the strong sea air, and your slumbers will be as refreshing and dreamless as those of a little child." At any rate, such is the case with our little shooting syndicate, and each member of it sleeps religiously on a lair of hay during periodical visits to the marshes.

As ill-luck had it, G——, the best shot amongst us, sustained an ugly fall when cubbing with the —— Hounds, on the very morning preceding "St Partridge" day; and the man-of-law who took the unfortunate sportsman's place in the line of guns, although a rattling good fellow, proved a devilish bad shot—I sincerely trust he will not read this sketch—as will presently be told.

The First opened gloriously, and H. B. M. (lawyer) and myself, not forgetting a team of well-broken black retrievers, journeyed down to W—— by a very early train from Liverpool Street; and ere the majority of good citizens had left their beds we were bowling merrily along the seven miles of dusty highway which lay between the quaint little railway station and our destination.

WE ENTERED A LONG, NARROW STRIP OF ROUGH GRASS

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The old marsh bailiff, and half-a-dozen grinning yokels, who were to act the several parts of beaters, lunch and game carriers, etc., were ranged in clumsy attitudes round the ivy-wreathed porch of the high-gabled, old thatched homestead which was to form the headquarters of our little party for the next two days.

By this time we were quite ready for a second breakfast—my preliminary breakfast, a "Bath Oliver," and a glass of "Glenlivet" and milk, was made shortly after five o'clock A.M.—and ample justice having been done to a huge dish of particularly fat green-bacon and new-laid eggs, the guns were put together, and we set out, two to kill and two to miss; the latter being the lawyer and myself.

We elected to shoot first the marshes in the vicinity of the homestead, and, leaping a wide boundary dyke by means of the poles carried by our henchmen, we entered a long, narrow strip of rough grass lying under the sea-wall. Beyond the latter ran a navigable salting-fringed creek, which wormed its way through many miles of salt-marsh and ooze-flats until it became lost in the North Sea.

Scarcely had we set foot in the grass than a covey of thirteen strong partridges rose from almost under M——'s feet, who was placed outside gun on the left flank. He pulled both barrels into the covey, but the result was bloodless. A brace flying somewhat wide of their fellows passed me, offering an absurdly easy "double," but, alas! my powder proved as "crooked" as did M——'s, and

never a feather did I touch. Not so the guns on my right, however, both of whom scored a right and left to their credit ere the first covey of the day had crossed to the neighbouring marshes, over which we had no sporting rights. The report of the last shot fired had hardly died away than a big hare was set afoot by old Carlo, and away she quietly loped right ahead of M——. Again the cartridge in the lawyer's gun barrel "snapped," and away stole Mistress Puss unflecked, and as though she rather enjoyed listening to the salute fired in her honour; while Carlo looked first at the retreating game and then at the shooter, as though to say, "If you 'muff' another hare in that manner, sir, hanged if I won't chase."

One beat sufficed to work out the rough bit of cover, which, beyond the brace of birds mentioned above, yielded but a humble rabbit, accounted for by H——, who was on my right hand.

We now entered a big lucerne marsh, at one end of which was a fairly large fleet of water, that usually held a few couple of mallard, widgeon, or teal. "Partridge" was the order of the day, however, and we therefore agreed to leave the fleets (there were two) until later.

It looked as though the first beat across the lucerne marsh would prove blank, but just as the guns were nearing the fleet a couple of red-headed pochards rose from a sedgy dyke within easy reach of B——, who killed clean with his right and dropped the second bird with a wing down with his left barrel. Almost simultaneously a good

covey of partridges got up from a clump of dry rushes between H—— and myself, and although a very long shot from the former, he managed to stop one of their number with his second barrel, while I—well, I missed. Thoroughly disgusted with myself, I watched that beautiful covey skim over the treeless levels until they appeared but mere specks against the most distant part of the sea-wall. At length I marked them down into what I knew was a small marsh of rough grass. Three and a half brace of birds and an ancient dun-coloured hare, which the bailiff declared had escaped both dog and gun for at least twelve years, were shot in the big lucerne marsh, the odd bird forming my humble contribution to the bag. A description of the manner in which each individual head of game was killed or missed, before a halt was called for luncheon, I shall not attempt. But the aggregate bag, when laid out on the shaded side of the sea-wall, consisted of $11\frac{1}{2}$ brace of partridges, two pochards, one mallard, five hares, and a rabbit.

It was during the *al fresco* meal that I heard the following interesting and, to myself, edifying exchange of speech between a couple of our bucolic henchmen:

"Say, Bill, the long bloke with the white choker round his troat do shoot holy bootiful. Oi only see 'un miss dwo birds all marning."

"Yes, yes, Tommy, boey, he be a proper sort o' gunner, and no mistake; and t'other 'un with the fore and aft cap b'aint so fur behind 'un, neither."

"No, no, Bill, that he b'aint; but the thin 'un without

no whiskers [meaning myself] can't shoot no better than a owd cow. As for the lawyer man, danged if he's touched a feather. Oi tell ee, without a word of a lie, mate, he do shut both eyes every time he do pull. I heve watched 'un, cos I do carry his cartridge bag, loike " ; and so forth.

Were I to say that I felt either pleased or flattered at being classed as an inferior shot to the proverbial cow with the musket, I should scarcely tell the truth. Nevertheless, I could not but join in the merriment of my companions, who had also heard every word uttered by the rustic critics; and the genial lawyer, who laughed loudest of all, unblushingly confessed that he *did* shut both eyes each time he fired. " It is a nervous habit," said he, " which I have never been able to break myself of, passionately fond though I am of shooting."

" What is the best bag you ever made single-handed, M——?" was H——'s somewhat unhappy question, when the merriment at the expense of the templar and myself had somewhat subsided.

" One unfortunate rabbit, which, probably tired of life, must have deliberately run up to the very muzzle of my gun; for when I opened my eyes, after firing, there he lay, decapitated, almost at my feet. But that never-to-be-forgotten shot was made many years ago," was M——'s candid reply.

Nothing further was said on the subject, and M—— fired and missed to his heart's content during the remainder of the day, while I improved somewhat in my shooting.

A long, narrow lagoon of water, known as the Great Fleet, was first shot, and, as it required but a couple of guns to shoot it, the lawyer and myself were told off to work along the high reed-fringed shores, while H—— and B—— took up their stands amongst the clumps of sedges at the head of the fleet.

Having allowed our fellow guns sufficient time the dogs were sent into the reed-cover, and we started forward, M—— taking the right and myself the left hand beat. For some little time, beyond an occasional moor-hen which was allowed to go away unshot at, nothing was moved; but as I was in the act of crossing a particularly narrow and rickety plank spanning a sedgy dyke, five mallard rose with a great to-do within ten yards of me, and away up the fleet they went, heading straight for the hidden guns. Before I succeeded in scrambling to *terra firma*, the duck had passed almost out of shot, but I managed to drop the tail bird. "Bang! bang!" rang out my neighbour's weapon, and a double furrow was cut into the turbid water a good five yards to the left, and well under the course taken by the mallard. On and on string the fowl, straight up the fleet, all unconscious of the danger lurking ahead of them in yonder growth of wild rice.

A small white puff of smoke suddenly spurts up from amidst the reed-cover, followed by a faint report, and down drops one of the duck as though struck by a "stooping" peregrine. Another spurt of smoke and a distant report. But no; it is apparently a clean

miss this time, and on go the remaining leash of mallard towards the creek. It is H——'s turn now; and before the "Crack, crack!" of his 12-bore reaches our ears, a couple more of the fleeting forms drop like stones into the reeds, leaving but one solitary member of what was a few moments ago a bunch of fat and strong young wild duck, to find a safer harbourage among the dykes and fleets of the neighbouring marshes.

A couple of coot were next found, and set a-wing by old Rake, from the aquatic growth on my side of the fleet, both of which I managed to stop with a "right and left."

No more fowl of any kind were met with on the big fleet, and the smaller lagoon yielded but a couple of mallard and a solitary teal. No one was surprised at the paucity of the fowl on the fleets, as the young broods of wild duck had been very much thinned out on the opening day of the wildfowling season, and the foreign duck had not yet arrived.

The fleets shot, a move was made to the uplands, when $8\frac{1}{2}$ brace of partridges, a landrail, 3 hares, and several rabbits were added to the bag; no fewer than 5 brace of the little brown birds being shot in a small field of turnips and potatoes.

We stopped shooting shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon, by which time both men and dogs had had enough for one day.

"I hope you've enjoyed the day's sport, M——," said

H—— to our guest as we set out on a bee-line across dyke and marsh for the homestead.

"I have had a rattling good day," replied the man-of-law; adding with a smile, "and I never shot *better* in my life."

He had evidently forgotten the day upon which he decapitated the unfortunate bunny.

IR, it's just five o'clock," said my host's white-headed old butler-valet, as he drew back the window curtains, and allowed the first bright spears of the morning sun to creep into my bed-room.

" All right, Richards; I will be down to breakfast within ten minutes," sleepily replied the writer, who is a bad hand at turning out of bed at ungodly hours of the morning, even though it be to bustle the cubs on the uplands, or to enjoy five-and-twenty minutes' flight shooting on the marshes and saltings, a distant view of which dyke and fleet intersected levels was to be seen from the rose-wreathed windows of my room.

The head of the shot-riddled but ever running fox on the stable roof pointed towards the east, and the water in my tub had a decided autumnal chill with it. The thin " cords " I intended wearing were therefore thrown aside for nether garments of stouter material; and, having made a somewhat hasty toilet, I went down to the

breakfast-room, to find my host delving into the depths of a well-proportioned game pie.

Ample justice having been done to the good things of the breakfast-table, the nags were brought up to the house. The ewe-necked thoroughbred weed, which I had picked up at a local Tattersalls, for a "mere song," a few weeks previously, made but a sorry-looking companion to G——'s smart 14·2 polo pony. His looks belied him, however, and, under a light-weight like myself (9 st. 8 lb.), he proved not only a good stayer, but clever to boot; and although inclined to be excitable at the first sight of hounds, he is a pleasant enough little mount when they are running.

But let us jog on to yonder strip of covert under the hill, for the splash of scarlet flitting here and there midst the crimson, russet, gold and emerald-tinted foliage, is the coat of Tom, the huntsman. Hark! a whimper, and yet another, and another. But that puppy music has not the true ring about it, and I warrant some of the young entry are "running riot." Ah, hear how Tom rates them! "'Ware hare, ye varmints!" Crack, crack, twang, twang, twa-a-a-ang. "'Ware riot, 'ware riot. Dang your blood. I'll draft ye for currant-jelly dawgs," cries the irate huntsman, as he doses the canine offenders with both whip and tongue.

The "rioting" is soon over, however, and the "Hieu, push 'em up, me little darlings; hieu, wind 'em, me beauties; yeo-o-o-up," of the huntsman, the shriek of a jay, or the shrill chip-chip-chip of a blackbird, are

the only sounds heard amidst the dead stillness of early morning. Then a deep, bell-like challenge is given by Sweetlips, and a minute later the wood is filled with soul-stirring hound-music.

"Gad! how the varmints are being hustled," remarks my companion, as we canter along the grassy lane which leads to the copse.

Scarcely are the words uttered than a remarkably well-grown cub comes sneaking along the growers of a hedgerow heading almost straight for us.

A few moments later the little red rascal crosses the lane. Away he speeds over a big grass field, and a whipper-in shrieks out an ear-splitting, "Tally-ho; gone away, gone away!" Old Truelove leads the young entry out of covert, and they stream over the first enclosure. The huntsman (the M.F.H. is not out this morning) first, the second whips, and a baker's dozen of men; amongst them a hard-riding *medico* and two or three farmers come pounding along in the wake of the hounds, all as keen as mustard. With a buck my companion's mount is over the stiff bank of fence, and into the pasture, without touching a twig; and almost before I am aware of it, the "weed" is boring his way through the densest and thorniest part of the quickset, from the midst of which I emerge minus a coat-tail, and with my face scored like the back of a roast sucking-pig.

"You got over, or rather *through*, that fence nicely, judging from the state of your countenance," grinningly exclaimed the facetious G——, as, with my mount pulling

A STRAIGHT-NECKED CUB

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almost double, I ranged alongside him once more. I did not deign a reply; but the day was still young; and upon more than one occasion I have known "the man who laughed last to laugh most heartily."

"Bravest little owd vox as ever broke covert," cries a burly yeoman in quaint East Anglian dialect, as he goes bumping along on a thick-set cob towards a convenient gap. It is a game cub we are hunting, in all truth, and had one not viewed him away it would be easy to imagine that an old dog-fox was running before hounds.

By Jove! what a thundering smasher the man on the flea-bitten grey has come, through his mount breasting the big bank yonder, and pitching him neck and crop into the lane beyond. 'Tis soft falling, thanks to the mud, however, and beyond an extra coating of good old-fashioned loam the unseated sportsman is but little the worse for his fall; and, having got into the saddle again, away he scurries to make up lost ground. Such a head are hounds carrying that they have scarcely given tongue since breaking covert; but while running past a picturesque ivy-clad manor house, nestling amongst its trim privet-hedged pleasure grounds and gardens, such a glorious clash of music breaks the silence of the morning that the inhabitants of the old house are awakened from their slumbers; and some of the younger and keener-sighted followers of the hunt catch a momentary glimpse of "charming creations" (I believe that is the correct term) of cambric and dainty laces through the openings of the window curtains.

The quarry is now running in view across a wide, undulating wheat-stubble, and heading for a disused sandpit, which is simply honey-combed with rabbit-burrows, amongst which Master Pug might find a haven of refuge from his pursuers. "Forrard! forrard! forrard!" shrieks the huntsman, as he cheers on the eager hounds in his anxiety to " blood them," and knowing full well that if once the cub gains the rabbit-warren, he will save his *mask*. But mark ! the little vulpine hero changes his line, and points for the ozier-fringed brook which shimmers under the bright rays of the sun like a streak of silver. A " burst " of fifteen minutes without a momentary check occurring would severely try the mettle of the staunchest cub ever whelped, and the straight-necked little beggar before us begins to lag perceptibly. Hounds gain upon him at every stride, and, as he takes a " header " into the sedgy brook, the handsome, badger-pied son of old Doctor closes his fangs with an ugly "snap" within an inch of his brush. Now, with a mighty splash, the pack plunge into the turbid water and swim towards " the little red varmint," who is still gallantly struggling to reach the ozier-bed on the far side of the stream. But his last bolt is shot. " Who-whoop, tear 'un and eat 'un !" Alas ! that that game cub did not live to run another day.

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

THAT little gaggle of grey-lag geese have taken possession of the meal marshes on Reedy Island, winter after winter, ever since Jack Conway was a lad. The original number was fourteen, but whether the missing goose died of old age or a dose of lead from some fowler's gun will never be known. Be that as it may, the thirteen that remain to-day are, in the language of the East Coast marshman, "the d'—dst, masterful, cunning, owd varmints as ever wore feathers." Right in the very middle of the marsh will they always pitch, to feed upon the tender and succulent young grass, choosing a spot where there is not sufficient cover to harbour a hare, and, of course, far out of gunshot of any dyke or gut, along which, by wading noiselessly, one might possibly manage to stalk them.

Not once or twice, but scores of times, had Jack tried to out-manœuvre those wary and cunning old geese, but never a shot would they allow him to get into them; and

as they migrate each succeeding spring to their northern breeding-ground, his blessing goes with them in the shape of a heartfelt wish that they may be netted by Pluto ere they reach their destination. But those grey-lags escape not only the snares of old Nick, but the guns of more reputable sportsman than he, also. True, when Jack was about sixteen years of age [he is grown grey as a badger since then] had not the ice on the dyke, along which he was crawling, caved in and let him into some five feet of the foulest slime and water it is possible to imagine just as he was drawing within range of a couple of the birds, which were feeding close together, probably at least two of the gaggle would have been scored to his credit, providing, of course, that he held straight, and also that his ancient muzzle-loading 8-bore had not missed fire—a pleasing little knack it had with it when pointed at nobler fowl than a " trip " of shanks or dunlin. But I am digressing from the true gist of my yarn, and will, therefore, hark back to Conway's last, and, doubtless, final, attempt to stalk the grey-lags of Reedy Island.

It was near the end of December when Jack paid his annual fowling visit to the island, and scarcely had he crossed the headland than old Togood, the bailiff, informed him that " they owd grey-lags had taken to the big lucerne ma'sh agin."

Jack was quite prepared for the news, and told Togood that his grey-lags might flight to a certain warm clime, if he choose, for he would have nothing to say to them.

" Now, look 'ee here, maister, I tell 'ee how yew can

"I'LL TELL 'EE HOW YEW CAN GET A SHOT INTO THEY GEEZE"

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git a shot into they varmints o' geeze as easy as yew could into yonder chuckens "—pointing to a lot of barndoor fowl. "The owd dun mare hev been turned down in the grazin' ma'sh ever since October, 'cause she be past work, like; and she do graze within a yard of the birds without them a-taking any sort o' notice of her, so used hev they become to her owd carcase. When she do come up to the stack-yard to-night, us'll keep her there till marnin', put a halter on her, and you'll creep up to they geeze alongside o' she easy enough."

Having delivered himself of the foregoing oration, Togood puffed at a short and particularly black clay-pipe and waited for Conway to congratulate him on the fertility of his brain. Jack did so by remarking, "First catch the mare and then stalk the geese"; for he knew the skittish, twenty-three year old steed was a perfect demon to catch in spite of years and stiffness; and as for geese—well, as already stated, he had stalked them from boyhood to middle-age without success.

"*Will* 'ee try to get at 'em with the mare?" anxiously inquired the bailiff, who was really a good fellow, and as keen as mustard where wildfowl are concerned; and who seemed terribly disappointed at Conway showing so little enthusiasm in his suggested scheme.

"All right, Togood; do you capture the mare, and I'll have one more wild goose chase," was the reply. "And now go and see what the good wife can provide for supper, for I'm devilish hungry after my long ride across the sands."

Jack had made an excellent meal off the best the bailiff's wife had to offer him, and was enjoying a pipe of tobacco over a blazing fire of driftwood in the stone-floor kitchen, when Togood came in to say that the mare was safely collared for the night, adding; "Do 'ee be after they owd geeze with that gert shootin'-iron [single 8-bore] o' yourn before it be light, and I'll warrant the mare'll take 'ee right up to 'em, for they allus feeds where the plant be sweetest; and so do she, the cunning owd varmint."

Jack promised to be up before dawn, and, having poured out the marshman a stiff glass of grog, he bade him sit down and yarn to him. As a yarnist bailiff Togood, who formerly followed the occupation of wildfowler fisherman, is hard to beat; in fact, one might safely back him to reel off more fishing, fowling, and smuggling lies in a given time than any traveller alive. For perhaps an hour [to his shame] Jack allowed his companion to fib to his heart's content; but when he began to explain how he and Bill Somebody bagged 108 brents at one shot with a stanchion gun off Mersea Island — ay, and gathered them, too; and then there were sundry pricked birds which they didn't trouble to follow up — Conway thought it was about time to send him upstairs to his wife; and he left the room, muttering, "Ay, 128 brents, and never a bird ex-agg-er-rated."

The next morning Jack was awakened by a loud banging on his bedroom door, and the musical voice of

the bailiff, calling, "It be very nigh sunrise, maister, and time to be a-going after they owd geeze."

By the dazzling light of a halfpenny rush-dip he struggled into his clothes, took a couple of cartridges from the magazine, his gun from the corner, and then stumbled down to the stack-yard to find the ancient dun busily engaged in tunnelling through a stack of fine clover hay.

"Good heavens, man, the brute has eaten half a load of hay! She'll burst," exclaimed Jack, as the bailiff cast the sickly rays of his lantern into the cavern made by the mare.

"Ah! yew don't know she, maister; whoy, that owd mare would eat the whole stack and never be none the wusser for it—no, never even cover a rib-bone, dang her!"

The next thing was to catch the old lady: no easy matter, for in spite of her age, every time the bailiff or Conway approached her, she plunged and kicked like an unbroken colt. At length, however, she was driven into a corner of the stack-yard, and, keeping one eye on her heels and the other on her ugly fiddle head, Jack gradually edged up and collared her near-side ear, which greatly resembled that of a lop-eared rabbit. Togood now came up with the halter, to which he had attached a line on either side, that Miss Kitty might be steered across the marshes.

By this time the first bright streaks of the morning began to appear on the eastern sky-line, and the sea-walls

and headlands were dimly discernible in the uncertain light.

"Yew see yon rise in the wall up against the fust fleet, maister? Well, if yew head for that there rise, ye'll fetch they geeze bootiful; and the wind's just right, too. Keep on the leeside of the owd mare, so as the birds can't see ye loike, and ye'll get a shot at them clean as a whistle."

"Yes, Togood, it is easy enough to say head for the rise in the wall, and I know pretty well where to look for the geese in the lucerne marsh; but how am I to get across the dykes?"

"There be only one dyke, Maister Jack, t'others heve all been filled in since you was last here. There be a ship [sheep] bridge over that dyke now, and the owd mare 'ood find her way across that theer bridge on a divil's dark night, let alone morning."

"All right; give me the halter, Togood," said Conway.

As might be expected, the mare strongly objected to leave her hay-tunnelling operations, and not until the bailiff had well basted her flanks with a hurdle-bar could she be prevailed upon to pass through the stack-yard gate, which led to the marshes. And even then, probably to show that she entertained no ill-feeling towards Jack, she jammed him against one of the gate-posts with her angular shoulder till he felt like an empty bellows. By dint of much hauling and chucking at the improvised reins, however, he persuaded the old lady to cease from

making a rubbing-post of him, and to proceed gooseward; and away she sped across the frozen marshes at a pace that would have astonished even the proverbial tortoise.

To have attempted to stalk the geese, head on, would have been fatal, for they would have twigged the fowler in a moment. He therefore had to steer crab-fashion, and at the same time to keep level with the mare's shoulder. Fortunately, she stood considerably over seventeen hands high, and therefore the crown of his head did not show above her withers. But to keep step with a horse is the most snatchy exercise imaginable. Every now and again Jack's equine friend would gaze at him with her one sound eye—a wall-eye—as though to ask, "What in the name of all that is unholy are you hanging on to me for, you wretched-looking biped? If you will follow me, you must go my pace." Then, out of sheer cussedness, she would stop dead to graze, and all the chucking and punching in the world would have failed to move her against her will.

No less than fifty minutes did that old dun mare occupy in traversing the first marsh; and by the time the sheep bridge spanning the division dyke was reached, the sun was well up in the heavens, and the cat ice on the fresh-water fleet glinted again under his bright rays. It was while crossing the bridge that Conway caught a momentary glimpse of the geese, which appeared almost as big as swans, right in the centre of the adjoining marsh, and about a quarter of a mile distant.

Now, although a stiff and piercingly cold north-easter

searched out every nook and corner of the wide and weird-looking expanse of treeless marshes, it blew directly down from the geese to Jack, and therefore those wary fowl were unable to scent him. The only question was, would they notice that their ancient equine companion had a kind of crab-like amble about her, and appeared to have borrowed an extra pair of forelegs ? Time would solve the problem ; and away went Kitty again at the same " breakneck " pace as before (about 80 yards an hour).

The bailiff did not err in stating that the mare would make a bee-line for the geese. She did ; but oh, ye gods ! did ever bee deviate from its buzzing flight hivewards to gather honey from the nectarian of outlying blossoms, as often as did Kitty from her course to lop a growth of lucerne ? And Jack hugging her ungroomed sides the while to keep out of sight of the geese, and steering her as best he could toward the distant rise in the sea-wall. How he cursed flighty Kitty for wandering from the straight road ; and once he ventured to give her a " rib-binder " with the stock of his gun ; but once only, for at the blow the fiddle head turned slowly towards him, and the wall-eye said as plainly as a wall-eye could, " Remember you are here on sufferance ; hit me again and you'll know it."

Slowly, but surely, man and mare drew nearer and nearer to the geese, which, although he had not dared to take a glimpse of them since leaving the sheep bridge, Jack knew had not flown, for a chorus of loud *honk-honkings*

would have proclaimed the fact. The excitement grew intense; and he noiselessly cocked his gun, for he was approaching within shot of the geese. The dead silence of the marshes was suddenly broken by the loud, trumpet-like challenge of an old gander sentinel, and the next instant the whole gaggle rose within sixty yards of Conway. To drop the halter-reins and jump clear of the mare's head was but the work of a moment, and singling out the nearest bird he pulled. "That's a dead bird for a hundred, for he's got the whole charge in him. He'll drop before he gets to the headland," inwardly exclaimed Jack, as with open-mouthed astonishment he watched the "skein" stringing away seaward. But no, the goose continued on its flight as though untouched, and, followed by blessings loud and deep, the birds passed over the grey, broken waters of the wild North Sea, until they appeared but mere specks on the horizon.

Walking over to the spot from whence the geese had risen, Conway picked up two grey feathers and a thin cardboard wad. Upon the face of the latter was marked a big 9. In the hurry and darkness of early morning he had taken from his magazine a couple of cartridges loaded for flocks of small waders.

"How about the old dun mare? did you ask, sir. Oh! at the report of the gun she bolted, and got cast in a dyke; much to the delight of Bailiff Togood, who had to walk six miles across the sands to the mainland to hire another horse to haul her out."

A DUCK DRIVE NEAR JOHANNESBURG

HE dam has been drained dry by the droughts and mine pumps, and the spur-wing geese and pink-bill teal, of which we were wont to take toll, have flown to other waters." The foregoing extract from the letter of a mining engineer on the Rand recalled to my mind many an enjoyable early morning and evening spent amongst the different kinds of fowl which used to frequent the small lagoon in question some ten or twelve years ago. The Wemmer dam lies within two miles of the "Golden City" of South Africa, and at the time of which I speak it was a fine, albeit shallow, piece of water, covering an area of perhaps twenty acres, and being fringed on all sides with high, bamboo-like reeds; while clumps of the same, growing in different parts of the lagoon, afforded excellent cover to the spur-wing geese, duck, pink-bill teal, coots, and other kinds of aquatic fowl which resorted thereto. The spongy shores of the dam, as well as the surrounding patches of

spruit intersected bog or marshland, were the favourite feeding grounds of common and painted snipe, greenshanks, avocets, stilts, plover, sacred ibises, and other species of wading birds. Several different kinds of herons and cranes used also to frequent this piece of water; amongst them grey, purple and white herons, crested cranes, and hammerkops.

Well do I remember my first acquaintance with the place. I was jogging quietly across the veldt, after an early morning visit to the then recently imported pack of English fox-hounds, which were kennelled at Geldenhuis, when a bunch of duck passed over my head, and I marked them down into the lagoon in question. Upon nearer approach I discovered that the pan of water was simply alive with different kinds of aquatic fowl, of the names of some of which I was ignorant, paddling in and out of the network of open channels amongst the dense carpet-like growths of beautiful lilies and other water plants. Determining to pay a visit to the place at an early date, I cantered into town, and that very same evening made arrangements with a couple of English mining engineers and a Boer lawyer to visit the dam two days later.

Shortly before dawn of the appointed morning my friends and myself, accompanied by a numerous following of blubber-lipped natives, left the slumbering and odorous (the sanitary men were hard at work) city behind us, and once free of tailing heaps, headgears, noisy stamp batteries, and gold mines generally, we set out in a bee-line

across the veldt. We had not proceeded far when G.'s pony put a foot into an ant-bear's earth, and, turning a complete somersault, gave his rider what looked to be a very nasty "purler." G., who rode well under ten stone, was but little the worse for his involuntary fall, however, and was quickly in the saddle again.

The first bright spears of the sun were beginning to show above the horizon when we off-saddled near the head of the dam. Here we held a pow-wow to instruct our ebon beaters regarding the manner in which they were to drive the lagoon. Having learnt their lessons, off went the Kaffirs, led by a huge Zulu, who bore the unenviable name of Mamba (venomous snake), and whom we had instructed to give a good *sjamboking* to any of his followers who disobeyed orders, or made too much noise during the drive. While hobbling the ponies, preparatory to turning them loose to nibble at anything green which they might be fortunate enough to find on the boulder-strewn, sun-baked veldt, a beautiful chanting goshawk suddenly appeared on the scene, to the evident alarm of the fowl assembled on the dam, for they instantly took refuge in the dense reeds. The timely visit of the goshawk augured well for sport, however, as waterfowl, in common with most birds, lie very close upon sighting a bird of prey.

Having watched the natives enter the far end of the lagoon until they commenced to wade through the evil-smelling, breast-high slime and water in open order, my companions and myself took up our respective stands

among the reeds growing at the head of the dam, each man choosing the firmest footing he could find. In spite of the fact that the chanting goshawk must have been cognisant of our presence, he still continued to quarter the dam, often passing within shot of the guns, but he was, of course, allowed to go on his way unscathed.

For quite three minutes the Kaffirs maintained what must have proved to them a painful silence ; but as they "sprang" a little bunch of pink-bill teal, such an unearthly volley of war-whoops went up that the friendly hawk departed from the scene at his very best flight; while huge spurwing geese, duck, teal, coots, and ibises appeared to rise from every growth of reeds and patch of sedge-fringed slob; and small wisps of snipe, trips of green-shanks and avocets, flitted restlessly round the shores of the lagoon.

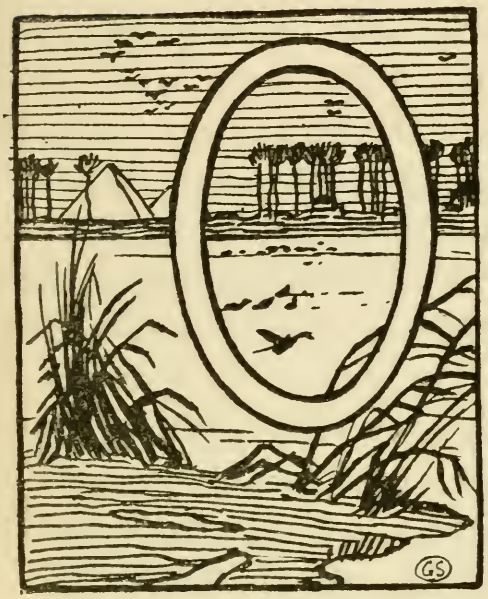
A skein of some twenty spurwings passing between de V. and myself afforded the Dutchman a beautiful crossing shot; and he very promptly cut down a couple of the great birds with a right and left. The geese were too far for my 12-bore, and with a sigh of regret I watched them string away across the veldt. The other men, who had taken up stands beyond the Dutchman, were hard at it by this time, and although the dense clumps of reeds obscured them from view, I saw duck after duck and teal upon teal drop to the contents of their guns. At length, just as I was beginning to think that my luck was out, a big "spring" of teal came heading straight towards me. The little ducks passed within

twenty yards of my blind, and so closely bunched were they that no fewer than five fell to my first barrel, while another, hard hit, after carrying on some twenty yards across the veldt, took refuge in a disused ant-bear earth, from the depths of which I was unable to extract him. For the next fifteen minutes or so the sport was fast and furious; and although personally I shot but very indifferently, my companions acquitted themselves in first-rate style; more especially the lawyer, who was indeed one of the finest game shots I had ever met with.

The beaters enter the last belt of reeds that lie between the guns and themselves, and in couples, and dozens, and small bunches, the wary old coots begin to leave their final haven of refuge. Quickly getting up speed, the dusky birds afford us some really sporting shots as they pass high overhead, or to right or left, at a pace that would not disgrace driven partridges. The drive is now over, and the yelling, slime-soiled natives are set to work to gather the spoil. Doubtless a number of both dead and wounded birds escaped the not too vigilant eyes of our human retrievers, to provide a feast later to the *aasvogels* (vultures), and other feathered scavengers of the veldt. Nevertheless, the bag proved a very respectable one.

The marshy land bordering the dam was next visited, when several couple of snipe and a beautifully plumaged avocet were shot. Then we rode back to the golden city, well satisfied with the morning's sport, and with appetites that must have astonished the waiters of the hotel at which we breakfasted.

FOWLING ON LAKE MENZALEH



ONE of the best, albeit the least known, of Egyptian wildfowling waters is Lake Menzaleh; a salt-water lake lying some two miles west of Port Said. This lake has hitherto been the undisturbed domain of native fisher folk. But a new enterprise has been set afoot to develop it; and it was on a steamer belonging to the enterprise—which, needless to say, is under British control—that I made my first acquaintance with the place. The starting point of the steamer is Rusonan, near Port Said, and the course lies due west to the village of Matarich, on the opposite mainland. *En route* half-submerged islands or *ghezirehs* are passed, and these I particularly noted for careful inspection at a future date. The islands in all cases are honey-combed with waterways—ideal spots, therefore, for fowl. The nature of the islands themselves is peculiar. On the poor substance of sand and mud no vegetation can grow save a small grub plant. In the distance these plants are singularly deceptive, and lead

one to believe that the *ghezirehs* upon which they grow are covered with wildfowl.

Though disappointed in one's first conclusions, highest hopes are fulfilled on making the shallows at the back of the islands, where huge companies of many different species of fowl are to be found. This was the experience of my second trip in the early hours of a January morning —a winter's morning according to the calendar; but I fear British wildfowlers would not allow this description of climatic conditions, seeing that neither sea boots nor sou'-westers formed part of our kit. All the more credit, however, to Lake Menzaleh.

Gunning-punts are unknown to the lake, but the native *felukas* with flat bottoms, drawing but a very few inches of water, answer the purpose quite well; and I have made some excellent bags of duck with a heavy double 4-bore gun rigged on an improvised crutch in the bows of a light *feluka*, with a light rope breeching rove through a hole in the stock and fastened to improvised trunnions whipped across the top of the crutch. This arrangement (the idea of which, by-the-by, I cribbed from the invention of a well-known firm of London gunmakers) acts admirably in the way of reducing almost to a minimum the recoil of the heavy shoulder gun. The first of the grounds, lying near the track of the steamers, will yield but comparatively few birds, but on deviating into the wilder parts better sport is obtainable. The best course to adopt is to make to the farthest grounds under cover of night, and work the islands at daybreak from

FOWLING ON LAKE MENZALEH

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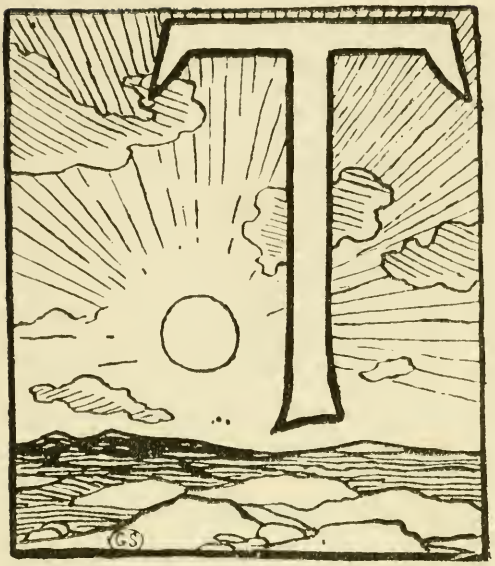
leeward to windward, travelling gradually into the regular channels.

The method employed by the natives in catching fowl is exceedingly interesting. The *beledy* rows his craft to within suitable distance of a paddling of duck and drops anchor. He then dons his sporting equipment, which consists of a breastplate fitted with a number of hooks similar to meat hooks, and a large gourd that covers the greater portion of his head. From his boat he swims or wades to within a short distance of the birds, and with Oriental stealth (all but the shell being under water) he mixes in amongst them. The duck are then drawn under the surface one after another and hitched to the hooks until the remainder of the "paddling" takes wing, when the fowler proceeds to other grounds and repeats his manœuvres. The chief sport on Lake Menzaleh centres around the wild duck, but one is usually certain of a shot at geese and flamingoes. Indeed, at certain seasons of the year the latter bird is almost as plentiful as are the duck.

FLAPPER SHOOTING



'WAS a blazingly hot August afternoon, and I was "lazing" at the open window, watching the heat-rays as they danced over the sun-scorched verdure of the almost deserted square; listening to the chattering of grimy sparrows; and longing for the heather and hills of my native country, when a telegram from my old friend Captain N—— was handed to me, which ran as follows :—" Jack and self are going to shoot the ' flappers ' on E—— Island on Wednesday next. Will you join us ? Wire."

A fast train from Liverpool Street carried me to the " one hoss " little railway station of S——, where I found N—— and his son, Jack—a fine specimen of the English public school boy—awaiting my advent in a roomy and well-laden shooting-waggon. Greetings exchanged and the toast " Plenty of fowl, and may they fly well," having been drunk over a glass of tepid soda and brandy (why is it that one cannot get an iced drink at the average English railway buffet ?), and the old Irish mare

was sent at a good ten miles an hour along the dusty road leading to the sands.

A twenty-minutes' drive took us to W— stairs, and then a strange and beautiful scene lay before our eyes. Far away to the eastward stretched a vast expanse of yellow tide-lapped sands, the hazy outline of the Kentish coast and hills being dimly visible across the wide, blue waters of the North Sea. Great flocks of gulls and waders were to be seen assembled on the sands and black grounds, or nimbly quartering the ooze in search of food.

Looking inland, mile upon mile of perfectly level and almost treeless marshes were to be observed. In most cases these marshes take the form of small islands, and in the reign of William of Orange they were reclaimed from the sea by Dutch engineers, who erected high sea-walls round them and so prevented the inroads of the tide. The islands form deltas to numerous creeks and small tidal rivers, and on most of them are to be found fresh-water lagoons, or, as they are locally called, fleets. Some of these pieces of water were doubtless depressions in the land before reclamation, but others were artificially cut by dead and gone marshmen for the purpose of concealing their boats, in the bad old days when armed bodies of Scandinavians landed on different parts of the east coast to indulge in a little plundering and filibustering. Sedges, bulrushes and wild-rice flourish in rank profusion round the shores of these fleets, and unless frozen out by hard weather, waterfowl of many different species resort to them during the winter, while in spring and summer they

become the home and breeding-place of the non-migratory ducks and coots. Redshanks, peewits, and partridges, also nest on the marshes. But to "hark back" to my friends, whom I left admiring the view from W— stairs.

The road leading from the mainland to the group of islands, of which E—— forms a unit, is marked out by a long line of beacons, which are sunk in the sands to a depth of several feet. This strange highway is passable only at low tide.

Shortly after leaving the Stairs, the youngster, who was keen as mustard, got down to try and obtain a shot into one of the many bunches of 'shanks and dunlin assembled on the black grounds on our left, and by "browning" a flock of some hundreds of the latter birds he managed to bag sufficient material to make a goodly ox-bird pudding. He also shot a redshank which, strange to relate, flew within range of his brand-new 16-bore. Having gathered the birds, the Wykehamist proudly returned to the cart to receive the congratulations of his father and myself. At length we drew up before the door of an old-fashioned, high-gabled homestead, to find the bailiff's wife—a buxom matron, weighing not less than eighteen stone—busily engaged in setting our room in order. Now, the furniture in this room was somewhat primitive. Two chairs (one a cripple) and an empty whisky-case seated our little party admirably, but the table, which was improvised from a couple of planks mounted on trestles, was a source of constant trouble and vexation of spirit: amongst other little peculiarities

it had an unhappy knack of tilting up every now and again, to the discomfort of ourselves and to the damage of sundry tumblers containing various creature comforts. Then, again, the plate and linen were not of the highest order, and several discoloured patches on walls and ceiling hinted at the possibility of agues, rheums and other pleasant marshland maladies lurking within the precincts of the musty compartment. But does any sportsman worthy of his salt make trouble of the small inconveniences which "crop up" upon such occasions as these? Nay! I verily believe they add zest to his enjoyment.

Having "cleared the decks" and ordered a simple but substantial dinner to be served at seven o'clock, we sallied forth for a stroll across the marshes, but had not proceeded far before we flushed several couple of duck from a reed-fringed dyke, and, upon the similar thing occurring a second time, it was agreed that the disturbing of the duck was not conducive to good sport on the morrow. The remainder of the afternoon was, therefore, "lazed" away with pipes and cigarettes under the shade of the sea-wall, and in watching the trips of waders pass up the quasi-river as they were driven off the flats by the incoming tide.

The clock was striking the hour of ten when the bailiff brought in several huge bundles of new and deliciously scented hay, upon which, and well covered by thick blankets, the captain and myself were soon sleeping that sound, dreamless sleep which comes to sportsmen and

tired beings only; our young companion making his couch on the oaken floor of the granary.

The first golden spears of early morning were just beginning to appear above the eastern sky-line when, accompanied by a brace of handsome and well-broken retrievers (the dog *par excellence* for wild-fowling), we started away from the homestead to wage war against the duck. We had not walked a hundred yards from the house when a couple of mallard rose from a small pond within twenty yards of N—— and myself. But so little did we expect to find anything before reaching the dykes that they were allowed to pass almost out of shot ere the contents of our four barrels were sent after them; then—probably more by luck than good shooting—a fat mallard dropped into a clump of dry rushes. I need scarcely say this incident put us on the alert.

As the dykes and fleets required but two guns to shoot them, Jack was told off to stop any fowl which might pass over to the island lying on the far side of the salting-fringed creek. We waited until the youngster had crossed the sea-wall, and, then, accompanied by the bailiff's son, Tommy, a sharp lad of thirteen years, who had been enlisted into our service to carry the slain, we walked quietly along the first dyke. For some little time, beyond a moorhen, which was allowed to go on its way unscathed, not a feather was moved. But, suddenly, with a great to-do, a brood of ten strong "flappers" rose in a bunch from a clump of sedges grow-

ing in a drinking-place, which was formed by a widening out of the dyke. The duck got up within a dozen paces of us, and N—— cut down three with his right and a single bird with his left, while I scored but one to my credit. We next worked along a wide feeder, which led directly to the big fleet, picking up here and there a duck, and disturbing others out of shot, which, in most cases, crossed over the sea-wall within range of Jack, the report of whose gun occasionally came to our ears. We were too far away, however, to note what sort of practice he was making with his new "Churchill."

At length we arrived at the head of the big fleet, which extended almost across the island, but in no part was the water of a greater breadth than fifty yards, and it was, therefore, easily worked by a couple of guns, one on either side. Here we enjoyed some pretty sport with the young ducks, for although, with one exception, every brood flushed was almost as strong on the wing as were the old birds, they allowed us to approach well within shot of them. A description of the manner in which this duck was shot, how that missed, how the dogs found and retrieved their birds, or how N—— quietly "wiped my eye" from time to time, would prove monotonous to the reader and embarrassing to the writer, especially the eye-wiping part of the story. Suffice it, the dykes and fleets of E—— Island yielded their full complement of fowl on that glorious autumnal morning, and long before the average citizen had left his bed our aggregate bag contained thirty-seven wild-duck, three teal, five

coots, and three redshanks, the last-named birds, together with a leash of mallard and a teal, forming Jack's contribution.

Poor little Tommy made many a journey across the marshes ere the slain were gathered together, for bunches of fowl had been left at different points along the fleets and dykes. At last the grinning, sweating little marshman brought up the last batch. It was by this time about nine o'clock, and having commenced operations shortly after five o'clock we sat on the embankment to lunch, and to smoke the pipe of peace and contentment.

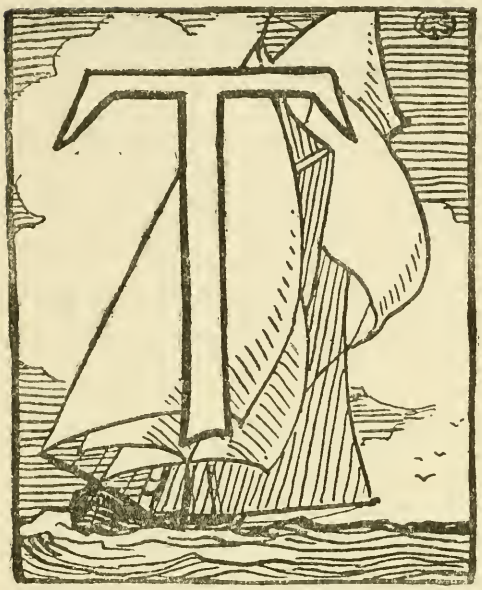
The salt-marshes were next visited, and a few stray shots taken at trips of redshanks and dunlin as they passed up and down the creek. Then came dinner, and right well was the youngster's ox-bird pudding enjoyed by all hands.

Shortly before sunset the captain and myself took our guns down to the fleets to "lay up" for the evening flight, while Jack had charge of the retrievers, which were again required to gather anything that might be killed. The duck were very late in arriving that night; so late indeed, that I might almost have left my gun at home, for owing to defective sight, fowl passing through the uncertain light appeared but the dimmest shadows to my eyes; and although I burned a considerable amount of powder I only accounted for a couple of mallard. Not so my gallant friend, however, who, from his stand among the tall reeds of the smaller fleet, obtained some excellent

sport, and killed seven duck and a teal during the short flighting time.

The flight over, and the fowl retrieved from the water and reed-cover by old Nell and Grouse, we returned to the homestead to yarn of sport enjoyed with horse, gun, and rod, until the early hours of morning.

A SHELLBACK OF THE CROUCH



"THE moorings must be left before six o'clock to-morrow morning, gentlemen, or we shall miss best part of the ebb tide," said Dan H——, a well-known Burnham fisherman-wildfowler, as Jimmy Maldoon and myself wished him "good-night" in the coffee-room of that comfortable Burnham hostelry, *The White Hart*, from the windows of which were to be seen innumerable yachts of all rigs and ratings, from a fine ocean-going steamer down to the small but speedy little "water wags," riding peacefully at their moorings in the River Crouch, which appeared like a river of molten silver under the beams of the harvest moon.

"All right, Dan; we will be on the club jetty at five o'clock sharp, and then we shall have ample time to get aboard and sail down along to the main on the ebb! Good-night!"

"How about grub, Marshman? Dan isn't half a bad trencherman, and your appetite is not a particularly

delicate one either, I remember. For a long day's fishing we shall require about a dinghy load of provisions. But, by Jove! all the shops will be closed, for its half past nine already."

"All right, Pat, you needn't worry your noble head about grub; I will ask our host to provision us."

Upon explaining our difficulty to the proprietor of the hotel, he very kindly offered to supply us with all we required from his own larder and cellar, and, having seen a goodly hamper packed, Maldoon and myself retired to rest at the comparatively early hour of ten o'clock. We were on board Dan H——'s snug little smack-yacht and sailing down river at five-thirty the next morning.

A "soldier's" breeze was on, and, therefore, Dan was able to pay more attention to his passengers than he would have, had the wind been ahead, and "bout ship" the order of the day.

He had something of interest to tell regarding every spit of ooze, patch of salting and foreshore, point, headland or bay, passed during the run down the river.

"You see yonder tongue of slob? I shot thirty-seven green plover on that tongue with the ode cannon (swivel gun) early one morning last winter. The birds sat on the mud as thick as a bunch of oxbirds, and if I hadn't loaded up for duck I should have got a masterful rake at 'em. Anyway, it was the best shot I got the whole season, for the weather was too open for fowl. That bend in the sea-wall, opposite the floating beacon, is a wonderful good spot to lay up for flight—the best place

for miles round, I reckon; for it lies in the direct line of the flight of the duck as they pass to or from the decoy ponds. Many's the time I've carried home a big load of mallard, widgeon, and teal after spending half-an-hour behind that bend."

"It was close to yon point—take a pull on the main sheet, if you don't mind, sir—that a gert ode whale got stranded some years ago, and all the men and boys—and I might say gals, too, for that matter—come down from all parts of the country, with masterful ode guns, scythes bound on poles, pitchforks, and every sort of weapon you can think on. But do you think they could kill her? Not much they couldn't; and in the end they hauled her 'fluker' up on the sea-wall with tackles, leaving her head in the river; and when the tide rose she was drownded. Whew, didn't that gert ode fish 'hum' in a few days' time, for she got stranded in July."

"Have a nerve-binder, Dan, and get forrard again to your yarns," suggest Maldoon, handing the skipper a bottle of beer, and slyly winking at me.

"Good health, gentlemen"; and then, without losing a moment, Daniel was at it again. "Can you see that long line of black ground just beginning to show dry above the tide? Well, gentlemen, without telling a lie, I've seen hundreds of thousands of brent[1] geese, not counting other fowl, feeding on the widgeon grass [*Zostera marina*], which grows in wonderful plenty along the

[1] During the Arctic-like winter of 1894-95 the writer saw many thousands of brent geese assembled on the ridge in question, but they were very wild and difficult to approach.

ridge : but of late years we ain't had any sort of fowling weather, and I can count the number of geese shot round about here last winter on my fingers and toes. Why, blowed if there ain't ode black duck again under yon spit of mud. She's been in the river ever since last winter. I reckon she's been badly pricked [wounded] or she wouldn't be here now. That ode oil bottle" (local name for scoters on account of their rank fishy flavour) " beats me hollow like, for I've read the black duck breeds in the Arctic regions. And now, gentlemen, by your leave, I'll drop the trawl here, and there being plenty of open water" (we were by this time clear of the Crouch and in the main), " I will ask one of you to take the tiller while I go down into the cabin and get the stove under way against biling the kittle for breakfast." Thus did Dan's tongue wag until we found ourselves well into the main, when the trawl was dropped over the stern, the weight of the net bringing the little craft almost to a standstill. It was a glorious morning, and we decided to lay the breakfast on the coach-roof instead of eating it in the somewhat stuffy cabin. Maldoon being a novice, I took the tiller while he busied himself with the contents of the hamper, and very soon a most tempting breakfast was laid out on the cabin top.

" Can you manage to boil a half-dozen eggs down there, Dan ? "

" Ay, ay, sir ; the kittle's just on the bile like, and I can cook as many eggs as you wish."

" How many can you eat, Dan ? "

"Well, that greatly depends what weight of ballast I lay in afore I start on 'em; but I bain't so wonderful peckish this morning, and so I reckon four will about do me."

"The devil it will," muttered Maldoon, looking at me, and holding up first ten and then two fingers, as a signal that there were but a dozen eggs all told in the hamper. Anyhow, Dan had his four eggs, and after we had all made an excellent meal, the net was hauled in board, and some scores of small and useless soft-shell crabs were first drawn on to the deck. Then came the pockets, in one of which was a roker of about 12 lb. weight, and in the other pocket two pairs of soles of $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. each.

Next, with a "hauly ho," the purse (extreme length of trawl) was pulled in and was found to contain several pairs of fine soles (the largest $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb., a specimen fish for the Crouch), three fair-sized roker, a score or so of small sand dabs, plaice and flounders, and two small codlings.

Then came the refuse of the net, in the shape of a hideous little fish of the gurnard species, called by the fisherman a "bullrout," a couple of sea-urchins (Dan called them hedgehogs), and about half-a-dozen strange, hairy-looking creatures known as sea mice.

"What would you take this to be, sir?" asked Dan, as he handed Maldoon something that might have been taken for a headless green beetle, or the fruit of some kind of seaweed.

"Seaweed, of course," boldly replied Jimmy.

"Then you would call it wholly wrong; for *that* be the

egg of one o' they roker, laid after she got in the net." And, to satisfy Maldoon that he was not joking, the skipper opened the biggest of the roker, and drew forth a handful of similar eggs, together with a quantity of immature eggs resembling the yolks of an ordinary hen's egg.

"Lesson No. 1. regarding the roker," said Pat; but he had more to learn about the roker—more, indeed, than he bargained for, as I shall presently show.

Shortly after the trawl had been cleared of crabs, sea-weed, etc., it was again dropped over the stern; and then Dan set to work cleaning the catch, laying the smaller flat-fish and bullrouts on one side, to be hung up in the rigging to dry and become firm before being fried on the cabin stove for luncheon.

"What a magnificent view!" suddenly exclaimed Maldoon, as he sat smoking on the cabin top.

"Ah! it's a fine view, and no mistake, sir. Those high landmarks you see to the southward are the Reculvers towers; and if you look through the glasses further along the coast, you will be able to make out Margate—I can see it with my naked eye. That piece on the Essex coast is Clacton; and, deary me, how the place have growed the last few years. It don't seem long since it warn't much more than a village, and gunners used to get some tidy shooting along the shore; but, bless me, you wouldn't see half-a-dozen head o' fowl there in a season, nowadays. Tide's just on the turn, gentlemen, and we'll take another haul at the net when you're agree-

able ; and then us must go up the Crouch above Burnham, for us must always keep agoing with the tide."

The net was hauled, and although the catch of soles was smaller than before, the contents were more varied. Amongst other fish captured was a roker, weighing $15\frac{3}{4}$ lb., which had torn a big hole in the " pocket," and was in the act of escaping from the net when Maldoon " collared " him in the nick of time.

Unfortunately, however, my Irish friend, not being particularly well versed in the anatomy of fishes, plunged two fingers into the great open mouth of the hideous-looking creature, and the next moment, with a yell of pain, he was jumping about the deck with Master Roker hanging on like grim death—not to a nigger, but to Patrick's fingers; and it was not until Dan forced a marling spike into the fish's mouth that it relinquished its hold. Then we found that poor Maldoon's fingers were very badly lacerated ; indeed, the top of one was almost bitten off.

" Hang me, if ever I touch one of those ugly cat-tailed divils again," cried he, as we bandaged up his mutilated hand. I have an idea that Pat will keep his vow.

The rest of the day was spent in trawling between Fambridge Ferry and the mouth of the Roach river ; but to give an account of each haul of the net made during that long October day would, I am afraid, prove monotonous. Suffice it to say that Maldoon and myself carried over 10 lb. weight of fine soles back to London the same

evening, and Dan's last words to us were, "Come down for a few days' fowling the first spell o' decent weather[1] we get, gentlemen, and I promise you shall take back as many fat mallard as you'll care to carry. *I knows where to find 'em.*"

[1] Hard, frosty weather.

ON MARSH AND DYKE

DREARY, desolate-looking spot was the little marshland island of N——, situate as it was seven miles from anywhere and everywhere, and its inhabitants—an old man, his wife and nine children—were, if anything, more rugged and inhospitable than the island itself.

N—— Island (now inundated every tide, from the sea-wall having been washed away some seven years ago) consisted of some 1700 acres of dyke and fleet-intersected marshes, and was as bare and flat as a billiard table. But one road led to the place, and that was passable only at low tide, for the simple reason it lay along the Maplin sands. Clumps of broom sunk in the sand at intervals marked the course of the road, and woe be to the unhappy wayfarer who ventured along that track in fog or darkness, for the chances are he would wander out to sea and drown, as have others before to-day.

It was late in November when B—— and myself left the fogs and rains of London and journeyed down to

A DREARY, DESOLATE-LOOKING SPOT

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Shoeburyness Station by an early train, with the intention of spending a few days amongst the feathers and fur of the island.

Placing our guns, kit-bags, and a hamper of provisions, in a butcher's cart (the only conveyance obtainable in the one-hoss village of W——), the ancient nag was sent along at his best pace, and we reached our destination, after a drive of something under seven miles, in the record time of one hour and five minutes.

It would have been useless writing Thomas, the bailiff, advising him of our visit, for there was no postal communication between the mainland and the island; even had there been, neither he, his wife, nor either of his interesting offspring could read or write a word of their native language.

I remembered the old bailiff as being a red-headed, red-whiskered, red-tempered little man, standing some five feet nothing in his hob-nail boots; and I also remembered he had dwelt on N—— Island so many years, left by his master (one of the easiest-going of easy-going West-countrymen) to do almost as he pleased, that he had learned to look upon the place as his own little domain. I was, therefore, somewhat anxious as to what sort of a reception he would accord to B—— and myself. Regarding that point, I was not long left in doubt, however, for, as we jolted along the rough road leading from the headland to the homestead, I espied the bailiff and all the members of his family standing at the door awaiting our advent.

"Good-morning, Thomas," I cried, as we pulled up before the interesting crowd of gaping marshmen and marshwomen, who lined up like a company of infantry to receive us.

"Who be yew?" was the reply to my genial greeting.

"Oh, only a particular friend of Mr D——, who is, I believe, the owner of the island; and this gentleman and myself have, at his invitation, come down for a few days' shooting. I hope the room is ready for us?"

"No, it bain't, and, what's more, neither yew nor your friend be a-going to stop here unless I gets orders from the governor. I never set eyes on ere a one of yew afore, and I 'ont believe yews got any right here, that I 'ont."

Having delivered the foregoing polite and hospitable speech, the bailiff, followed by his sixteen-stone wife and nine children, disappeared into the house, slamming the door after them.

"A pleasant welcome, Jack," I remarked to my companion, who sat in the greasy meat-cart spell-bound. For a few moments there was dead silence between us, and then we both burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, for the whole business was so palpably absurd. My turn was to come, however, and, walking into the brick-floored kitchen, where I found the whole family seated before a huge fire composed of wreckage washed up by the tide, I gave the bailiff such a rating that he very soon began to sing small. Telling one of his lubberly sons to carry the paraphernalia from the cart to

the living-room, and ordering a fire to be lighted in the same, I rejoined B——. Then, having paid and sent our Jehu back to S—— with the ancient horse and cart, we went into our room to see that it was put ship-shape.

The room looked just as I had last seen it, seven years before. The same camp bedsteads were in either corner, the same caricatures of the different men who had shot on the island and inhabited that room (alas ! how many of the best of them have gone over to the great majority) still hung on the walls. A square of carpet, a deal table, three particularly hard chairs (one a cripple) and a champagne case turned on end, which acted the double purpose of washstand and extra chair, completed the list of furniture. It was in this room that the somewhat fastidious B—— and myself were to take up our quarters for two or three days. B——'s only remark upon surveying the apartment was, "Thank heaven, we've brought plenty of whisky and baccy with us ! "

"We always cook our own grub here, Jack," I remarked to my companion, who looked rather as though he wished himself back in his comfortable chambers in the Temple.

"The devil you do ; never cooked anything in my life."

"No ; but I have, and will back myself to cook game with the next man. But we must catch our game first, and meanwhile I will fry some of the ham we brought in the hamper. While I am engaged in my culinary occupation,

will you go and get some eggs from Mrs Thomas ?" I replied.

"No, by Jove, old man; I would rather face a squadron of dragoons than Mrs Bailiff, for, to tell you the truth, I am horribly afraid of her. Oh, that terrible breadth of beam ! I am confoundedly scared at Rufus, although perhaps I might hold my own with him in fair fight; but ask Mrs Rufus for eggs—NEVER !"

"You miserable lump of cowardice," I scornfully replied to B——, who really did appear afraid to approach the bailiff's wife for the required eggs. "Watch the ham and take care it doesn't burn, while I go for the eggs myself."

I did not go to our amiable hostess, but to the hen-house which stood at the back of the homestead, and was invisible from the kitchen windows. After foraging round a bit I managed to secure three hen's and one duck's eggs from the nests, and stowing the plunder in my coat-pocket, quietly but quickly returned to the living-room, where I found B—— holding on to the handle of the frying-pan, with his eyes raining tears, and coughing violently, amidst a cloud of smoke that filled the room, and indeed went everywhere but up the chimney.

"Great fun this camping-out sort of life, ain't it, Jack ?" Jack, didn't hear—or pretended not to.

Telling my companion to lay the *Standard* on the table (we couldn't find a table-cloth), I soon finished cooking the ham and eggs, and having made a good square meal, we took the guns out of their cases, put a few Nos.

5's and 8's in our pockets, and started to work through a patch of high rank grass, growing near the headland, which looked likely partridge cover.

Our departure from town was so sudden that I had no time to send for the old retriever that usually accompanied me when shooting on the marshes. A well-broken retriever or spaniel is quite an essential to the marsh shooter.

Scarcely had we entered the grass, which grew well above our knees, when a covey of nine partridges rose right ahead and within easy shot.

B—— scored with a right and left, while I "muffed" with my first barrel, but managed to stop the last bird as he was skimming over the sea-wall, and he fell with a resounding splash into the creek, which, during flood-tide, flowed round three sides of the island. B——, who happened to be walking close to the sea-wall, volunteered to go and gather my bird.

Now B——, who is somewhat short and rotund of stature, and more given to enjoying the good things of this world than of indulging in violent exercise, went at the wide boundary dyke like a good 'un, and had he not caught his foot in a clump of rank, matted sword-grass, just as he was "taking off," he would doubtless have cleared the dyke in grand style. But, thanks to the grass-trap, he took a header into shoulder-deep, filthy slime and water instead, gun, cartridge-bag and all, and rose to the surface a few moments later in a far filthier condition than any London sewer-man, gasping and

belching forth black mud and duckweed, like a humanised volcano.

B—— was in the act of taking his involuntary dive when "Rufus" appeared on the scene, accompanied by an old bob-tail sheep-dog.

"Dear! dear! danged if ye didn't do that neat as Bill Summer's owd cow, when her fell hinter the gert owd fleet last summer. Doubt there be a wonderful lot o' slob in that yer dick, a-judging from yer appearance, maister? But theer! it bain't no fault o' mine that the dicks be choaked, for I did tell the governor as how they should be cleaned out last toime he were over a-gunning. Well! well! there bain't no need to cuss and swear like that over a dive into a dick, maister; and ye be a proper mash-man[1] now. Whoy, ye bain't a-going to leave yer gun behind ye, be ye?"

"Oh! (gasp) d——n (splutter) the gun (spit), and get (snort) to blazes out (gasp) of this, you red-headed little brute (gasp, spit, snort), or I'll——"

"What 'ull ye do, maister? Ye mustn't come 'ere a-threatening innocent people for nothink; even if you do come from Lunnon, and reckon yerself a gunner, jest because ye happens to fall into a dick," cried the awful little marshman, from the safe side of the dyke, as poor B—— scrambled out of the foully-smelling mud and water.

"By gad! if you don't get out of my sight I'll shoot you!" roared, or rather gurgled, out B——.

[1] No man may be called a "marshman" until he has tumbled into a dyke.

"No, no, you 'ont, for yer gun be at the bottom of the dick along with the eelies."

Unfortunately, I possess a somewhat keen sense of humour, and the absurdity of that marshland scene—B—— shining like a disreputable "Father Thames," crowned in duckweed and other aquatic vegetation, and covered from crown to sole with a thick coating of the very "nosiest" of "nosey" black mud, dancing with rage, and hurling maledictions at the fiery red head of the insolent little bailiff, whilst the old bob-tail sheep-dog barked round and round him (B——) in a frenzy of delight—so appealed to my risibility that for a few minutes I was quite unable to render my poor friend the slightest assistance. But, when I did go to the rescue, he went for me "bald-headed," and in language more forcible than polite, informed me that he would return to town and civilisation that very minute.

"Don't you think you had better go up to the homestead and change your clothes, for at present you are scarcely in trim for London? It would also be as well to wait until the tide leaves the sands, unless you mean to swim to the mainland, old chap," I suggested, trying to stifle an irrepressible fit of laughter.

"Then, by heavens! I'll swim rather than remain on such a God-forsaken wilderness as this, amongst a lot of confounded savages!"

I ran poor B—— up to the homestead, and after a warm bath in a wash-tub (and a very small tub it was), and several stiff pegs of whisky, he began to thaw a little,

and agreed to pay a visit to the fleet with me after lunch to try for wild duck. But surely his Satanic Majesty was on the island that day ?

"I lay me loife there be a hunnard owd mallard in the gert fleet near the oyster-pits, for I seed 'em this marning when I goed down to the lucern mash to drive in the hosses!" cried Billy, the bailiff's fourteen-year-old son, whom, by the promise of a shilling, I had decoyed away from the kitchen fire to carry anything we might shoot.

"Which is the nearest way down to the fleet, my lad ?" I asked of the grinning little marshman as he trudged along between B—— and myself.

"Accrost the plank-bridges, maister; foller Oi and yew 'ont go fur wrong."

Those readers who have visited the east-coast marshes know quite well that a marshman's "bridge" consists of a narrow plank thrown across the widest of the irrigation dykes or channels, and will be able to realise how unsafe they become when covered with a coating of ice, as were the "bridges" on N—— Island that eventful day. More than once my stout friend was within an ace of taking another header into the sedges and duckweed.

At length the fleet was reached, and we very soon discovered that Tommy's "'underds o' mallard" had vanished like a dream, and, after very nearly an hour's hard walking along the fleet and pond-holes, our aggregate bag consisted of a pochard, a couple of coot, and a leash of snipe.

"I thought you said this was the best island for fowl anywhere along the coast," grumbled B——, as he gazed somewhat despondently at the meagre bag whilst we sat under the lee of the sea-wall to smoke our pipes.

Tommy saved the situation by remarking: "So it be, maister; leastways, faither do say so, and I reckon he knows a blazin' sight more about the mashes nor you or any other Lunnoner. But you can't allus expect to find fowl, can 'ee? Dear loife, look yonder to that gert bunch of owd oxbirds a-settled on the ooze spit; dang me if theer bain't thousands of 'em. Hand I yer gun, maister, and I'll show 'ee how to stalk they warmints."

We looked in the direction of a long spit of ooze lying about eighty yards outside the sea-wall, and some five hundred yards higher up the creek, upon which were congregated a flock of some thousands of dunlin.[1]

Putting a couple of No. 8 shot cartridges into my gun, and warning Tommy not to shoot himself, I handed the weapon to the little fourteen-year-old marshman, and away he started to stalk the dunlin; creeping snake-like across the muddy saltings on all fours, and taking advantage of every little bit of cover afforded by the sea-lavender and other rank salinacious plants that flourish so luxuriantly on the salt marshes.

At length he disappeared from view into a deep muddy gut, which wormed its sinuous way through the saltings down to the creek, and would take the boy within range of the birds. Some ten minutes passed by, but not the

[1] Dunlin or oxbird, a small wader scarcely worth powder and shot.

smallest portion of Tommy's anatomy did we catch a glimpse of as he screwed his way along the filthy rill.

Suddenly the report of a gun reached our ears from the mouth of the gut, and the next instant the whole flock of oxbirds rose like a cloud. Bang! rang out the second barrel; a lane was cut through the "brown" of the bunch, and the mud was dotted with dead and wounded birds for yards around. In less time than it takes to write it, the little marshman emerged from the rill as naked as the day he was born, and went wading through the breast-high and icy-cold water until he reached the spit, often sinking up to his middle in the soft, black mud. Having gathered the spoil, he half-waded, half-swam, back to where he had left his clothes and the gun, and, a few minutes later, joined B—— and myself on the wall.

"Well done, Tommy; how many oxbirds did you shoot?"

"Dwenty-dree, maister, and dwo or dree o' the warmints got into the creek afore I could get at 'em. They flaming ode saddle-backs, gulls, or hoodies[1] will hev' all that got away, but there be enough for a puddin' anyway." It certainly was well done, and the clever manner in which that youngster stalked to within thirty yards of the dunlin was little less than marvellous, and might have taught many a fowler of long experience a lesson.

It was now late in the afternoon, and the big, angry-looking sun was rapidly disappearing beneath the western

[1] Royston crows.

skyline. But as B—— was anxious to wait for the evening "flight," we took up our stands under the wall to catch the duck as they travelled from the main to their nightly feeding-grounds inland; Tommy remaining with B——, who was a novice at the game.

I had not long to wait before that whistling sound, so dear to the wildfowler, and caused by the wings of fowl cutting their way through the air, gladdened my ears. "Swish, swish, swish," they came, flying low and a little to the left of my stand.

I catch a momentary glance of some twenty whirling forms passing through the uncertain light like so many flashes, and, singling out the nearest bird, I pull at him. Bang! Hang it, a clean miss; but a dull thud in the lucerne marsh proclaims that I have scored with my second barrel, and I go to retrieve the mallard, as he may have but a wing down, in which case he would harbour in the first bit of cover at hand and would possibly provide a banquet the next morning to one of Tommy's owd "saddle-backs" or "hoodies."

I very soon found my bird (a fat mallard), and was returning to the sea-wall, when B——, who was placed some fifty yards distant from my "stand," suddenly let drive, and the pellets from his gun whistled most musically round my ears.

"For God's sake keep your gun up, B——," I cried.

"All right; duck were flying low," shouted back my careful friend.

B—— grassed three mallard and a widgeon during the short twenty minutes or so of the flighting time, whereas I—well, I did a good deal of shooting, but failed to score anything to my credit beyond the mallard before mentioned and (tell it gently) an old heron, which came gliding over my head like a grey phantom.

"Be *they* all yews got arter all the shootin' you did, maister?" said Tommy contemptuously, when I joined my companion after the flight; adding, "Wish I'd hed faither's owd shootin'-iron, I'd a showed yer how to pull 'em down."

"I believe you would have made a better show than myself, Tommy; and now take us back to the homestead by the shortest cut 'across the marshes.'"

"All right: gie oi the shillin' you promised, and I'll get 'ee both home in no time."

"Yes, when we return to the house, you cheeky young beggar."

"No, no, that 'ont do for oi; that's what Muster Scroggs did say when oi druve his owd ships [sheep] into Wakerin'. Never seed t'owd warmint agen, and faither tode oi allus to git my money afore-like. If ye don't gie oi me shillin' now ye can jist pig back by yeselves."

The night was too dark to allow me to watch the expression of B——'s face during Tommy's polite oration, but I heard him mutter, "Heaven forgive me for dwelling even one hour among such savages."

Personally, I rather enjoyed the whole thing, and was not in the least bit surprised at anything that happened

on N—— Island, for I had sojourned amongst the East-coast marshmen, and knew their gentle ways so well.

Handing Tommy a shilling, I ordered him to lead on. He led on with alacrity over the same sort of "bridges" as we crossed when walking to the fleet in the earlier part of the day.

"I'll be hanged if I cross any more of these infernal planks, for I am full of splinters already," suddenly cried B——, after he had wriggled crab-fashion over the third "bridge."

"Whoy don't 'ee walk over 'em like a man, instead of a-setting down at one end of the plank and a-pulling of yerself along on yer behind like a owd cock-crab until ye gets t'other end. Come on, maister, there be only foive more on 'em to get over."

Poor B—— remained for a moment absolutely speechless; then, with a snort of rage, he threw down his gun and made a rush at Tommy, who, however, dodged past his pursuer and went fleeting over the marshes, yelling at the top of his voice as he ran.

Suddenly there was a tremendous splash, followed by loud cries of "Help, help!" together with a gurgling volley of the most unlawyerly [1] language I had ever heard a respectable barrister use—or ever hope to hear again. Then I knew that B—— had received a second "marshman's baptism"! Picking up his gun, I ran in the direction whence the "music" proceeded.

[1] I have failed to find the word *unlawyerly* in either Nuttall's or Slang Dictionary.

"Holloa, old fellow, what is the matter now?"

"What's the matter! Did you ask, *what's the matter?* Oh, lud, what a lot of born fools there are about! Didn't that imp of h——l—where is the young scoundrel? I'll thrash him within an inch of his life."

"Oh, Tommy's half-way home by this. Take hold of the stock of my gun, B——, and I will haul you out in a jiffy."

B—— clutched hold of the gun, and with a "hauly-ho" I managed to pull him on to the bank, and had commenced to make a neat little speech to soothe his ruffled feelings, when he suddenly let go his grip and fell back into the dyke again, "as neat as Bill Summer's owd cow." But it were better that I should now drop the curtain over that marshland scene.

That same night a dilapidated old tumbril cart, drawn by an angular shire mare, rising nineteen years, might have been seen jolting across the Maplin sands towards Wakering Stairs. Seated in the cart were three men. The first, short and stout, garbed in a shooting suit about five sizes too narrow, and six inches too long for him, smoked in silence; the second, a red-headed, apple-faced little man, who amused himself by belabouring his skittish steed and muttering something about "Lunnoners and blazing turnovers"; the third, the writer of this sketch.

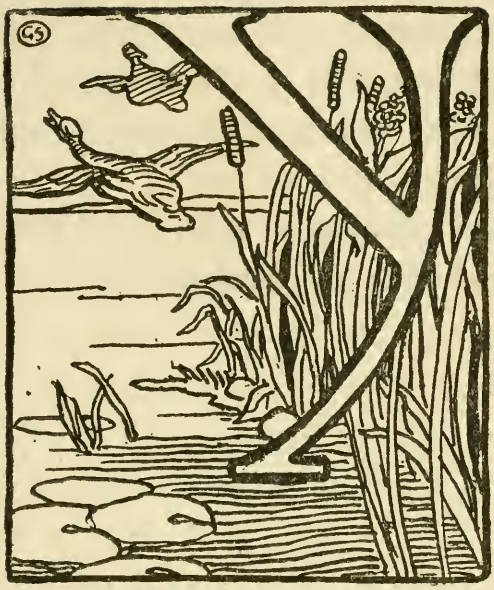
"Hanged if I drive up to Shoeburyness Station in this turn-out—I look quite fool enough already with these clothes bursting at every seam and button!" suddenly

thundered out the stout man, as the ancient manure cart went lurching and jolting along the road leading to the railway station.

"Well, well! now that ye be a proper dyked mash-man, surlie you bain't too blazin' proud to ride in a *mash* cart? You do wholly supperize me, maister."

"Sink your dykes and your marshes too, and if ever I set foot on one of them again, may I be——"

The rest of B——'s oration was drowned by the report of the nine o'clock gun, fired from the garrison hard by.



EW may jest as well save yerself trouble, and git back accrost the sands afore they be flooded by the tide; for Oi tell 'ee, maister, there be only one red-leg partridge and a blaimed owd dun-coloured heer on the whole island. Be there any wildfowl and fish in the fleets, did yer ask, maister? No, no; 'tain't noways loikely."

"Very strange," replied young Dundas to the foxy-looking, rufus-haired little marsh bailiff; adding, "Mr Beal told me there were plenty of hares, partridges and wildfowl, and that the fleets swarmed with pike, tench and eels, otherwise I shouldn't have dreamed of purchasing the beastly place."

"Bought the island, did yer say, maister? Bought the island from Maister Beal? Umph! Oi suppose yew reckon on sacking we, don't 'ee? But 'ee on't, for Oi've been on this yer island, man and boy, for over fifty year, and reckon as 'ow it belongs to me loike, and my missus do reckon so, too."

"Well, I suppose, as principal owner of the island, I may be allowed a voice in that matter even. And now, perhaps, you will be good enough to show me over the place?" returned Dundas, angrily.

At a jog trot, and grumbling like fury, the little bailiff managed to keep pace with his new and long-legged young master.

Suddenly, from a small reed-fringed pond situate near the centre of a lucerne marsh, up rose a couple of pochards within thirty yards of Dundas, who pulled at the leading bird, a fine drake, but missed him clean, and only succeeded in dropping his consort with a broken wing.

"Danged if my youngest nipper, Tommy, couldn't a shot better nor that!" remarked Rufus, as he went in chase of the wounded bird, which, having captured, he very soon despatched by calmly biting its head; and upon joining Dundas coolly suggested that he (Rufus) should take the gun, "as it wan't no blazing good a missing of birds loike that theer."

"I'll see you hanged first!" was all Dundas allowed himself to reply.

"All right, maister, heve yer own way; but us heve all got to learn, yer know," said Rufus soothingly.

Dundas had not left the pond-hole many minutes when a covey of nine partridges got up from a growth of rushes, and with a great to-do headed towards the next island. Again he missed with his first barrel, but managed to drop a bird stone dead with his second.

"Dear loife! if it b'ain't as good as a penny gaff to see 'ee shoot, maister! Whoy——"

"Oh, go to the deuce!" replied poor Dundas, who was becoming quite nervous under the criticism of his own bailiff.

As Rufus went to pick up the partridge he moved a big jack hare from a clump of spear-grass, which Dundas promptly bowled over with a dose of No. 4.

"Dang me if Oi be agoing to carry that gert owd heer about with Oi all over the mashes! She be as heavy as a ship [sheep], and Oi'll hang she on yonder gate till us do come back."

"I thought you said there was only one old dun-coloured hare and a French partridge on the island, Rufus?"

"No, no; that Oi never, maister. Oi towd 'ee theer was only one owd heer and a 'red-leg' on Redshank Island —them theer mashes ye sees yonder."

"Why, you confounded little liar, I never heard of Redshank Island before, and——"

The remainder of Dundas's speech to the untruthful little marshman will never be known, for, as he was speaking, a bunch of nine mallard came over the sea-wall from the adjoining island, and, although well out of shot of him, they dropped in a fresh-water fleet at the far end of the island.

"Us hed best walk the dykes, allus heading for the fleet, for loike as not you'll foind a spring o' teal and a few snipes. But I doubt ye can't hit a snipe for hoss beans, can 'ee, maister?"

"I've killed more snipe than ever you've seen," angrily returned Dundas, who had shot snipe in India.

"Ay, netted 'em, I doubt," muttered Rufus.

"Scape, scape!" and a couple of long-bills rose together from under the bank of the wide dyke, along which Dundas was working, and went screwing up the waterway. Bang! bang! rang out the double report of his gun; but the snipe continued on their flight unscathed.

"Not fur hoss beans," grunted out Rufus, loud enough for his young master to hear, who, hurling a blessing at his fiery-red head, ordered him to return home.

"All roight, maister. I 'opes as 'ow you'll find the planks accrost the dykes pretty easy, and, if you shoots a bit straighter, I reckon you'll have plenty to carry time ye leave the fleets!"

Dundas did not bargain for these obstacles, and advising the bailiff to keep his lips hermetically sealed during the remainder of the walk, under penalty of a good thrashing, he told him to follow on again, which he did, muttering, as he went, "Ye moight hit Oi onced, but ye 'oodn't hit Oi twiced."

At length the big fleet was reached, and for half-an-hour or so Dundas had a lively time with the fowl, bagging seven mallard, three pochard, four widgeon, and a teal, during the beat along the water. More than once he noticed the swirl of a heavy fish moving in the fleet, and asked the bailiff what they would be.

"Jack-fish, I reckons, and ugly owd varmints they be, with tooths loike sharks'."

"You told me distinctly that there were no fish in the fleets, Rufus."

"No, no, maister; Oi did speak o' Redshank Island. This yer fleet regular swarms with fish."

"I think I will call you 'Ananias' in future."

"Yew can call Oi whatsumever yew's a mind to; but my name be Willum—Willum Thomas—that's my name, and Oi don't reckon Animus, or whatever yew calls it, sounds more respectful-loike or be no easier to say than Willum,—or Bill, as I be generally called."

"No; but Ananias is a much more appropriate name for you than William," quoth Dundas. "By-the-by, how deep is the water in the middle of the fleet?"

"There b'ain't no bottom to it," replied the bailiff in a half whisper.

"Don't be a fool, man. How on earth could those reeds grow if there was no bottom to the fleet?"

"I tell 'ee there b'ain't no bottom to it. Me owd faither did tell me so more'n thirty year ago, and I reckon he oughter heve knowed, seeing as how he was a bred and born marshman and didn't die till he wor very nigh ninety."

"You'll break up and sow this marsh with oats, Ananias, and also the rough marsh near the homestead with barley. I will order the seed from Sheelsea to-morrow."

"No, no! Oi'm danged if Oi do, unless ye sends me a

fresh pair o' hosses. Ye see that owd grey mare in the lucerne marsh yonder, don't 'ee ? Well, she be twenty-vour year owd, and every time as Oi ploughs near a dyke she allus falls in, dang her: as fur her wind, whoy, ye can hear of her a blowing twenty rod away ; and t'other owd cripple ain't got a leg to stand on."

"The horses you have at present are quite good enough to plough and drill a few acres of this light soil, and, therefore, you and your sons will kindly commence the work to-morrow morning."

"No, no ! that us 'ont, maister. It be me owd 'ooman's birthday to-morrow, and Oi'd as soon die as work on that day."

"Perhaps you would like to take a week's notice, then," cried Dundas, wrathfully, to which suggestion Rufus replied most calmly :

"Now, look 'ee here, maister ; us don't want none o' that sort o' talk, for, as Oi tode 'ee this marning, Oi've a lived 'ere, man and boy, fur over fifty year, and Oi 'ont turn out o' the owd homestead fur no man. Why, Maister Beal he give Oi notice hundreds o' times, Oi reckon, and each toime when he comed over he used to say, 'Why, hang it, Thomas, thought I told you to get out of this ? What the deuce are you doing here ?' 'A-doing of me duty, Maister Jack, as me owd faither did afore me,' I used to say. Ah ! he wor a good 'un, wor Maister Beal. Wages awaiting at Post Orfice every Saturday, sure as the tide, and allus a shilling or two for the young 'uns when he came a-shootin' to the island.

Don't reckon yew fling much brass about, do 'ee, maister ? "

Dundas did not deign to answer, but strode away towards the homestead more determined than ever to get rid of the cheeky little bailiff. Little did he know of the wonderful adhesive power of Bailiff Thomas.

" My missus do want to know whether ye are going back to Lunnon early tide to-morrer or not, as ye eats pretty hearty, and us heve got only enough grub to last over to next Saturday without a counting of yew ? "

" Why, you miserable, inhospitable little beast, what food I eat I shall pay for. Tell your wife to kill a fowl for my dinner to-night."

" No, no, maister ; that 'ont do. All the chuckings and ducks belong to we, and we sells the best of 'em at 3s. 6d. a head."

Dundas had some faint recollection of sundry head of poultry appearing in the inventory of live and dead stock when he took over the island ; but he held his peace, and ordered one of the mallard to be cooked.

" How will 'ee hev it—biled or roasted ? " snapped out Rufus, as he went away mumbling: " I reckoned 3s. 6d. for a chucken would about frit he."

" Roast it, you idiot ! " and, slamming the door of the room set apart for the accommodation of visitors to the island, Dundas sat down in an ancient deck-chair to smoke and wait for his mid-day meal.

" What a God-forsaken spot to live on, and what savages to dwell amongst," mused he, as he sat looking

into the glowing driftwood fire which blazed and crackled cheerfully in the old-fashioned fireplace.

"I'll get back to town and civilisation to-morrow, and send McPhearson and his wife down to take the place of that red-headed little beast and his delightful family."

But to cut a long story short, we met young Dundas in London a few weeks ago, and asked him how he was getting on with his new property.

"Oh! hang the island! I've let it to a local grazier for £100 per annum, £52 of which sum I pay away in the course of the year to that little brute, Thomas."

"Do you mean to say that Rufus still reigns supreme on the island?"

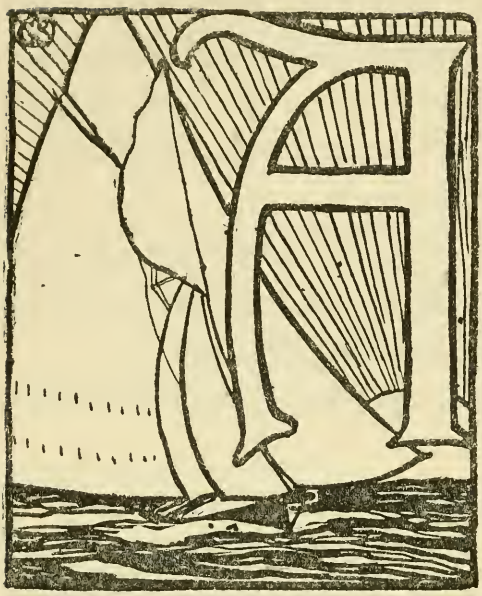
"Yes, worst luck. I've given him notice to quit at least a dozen times, but he so frightens each man I send down to take his place by tales of the sea-wall breaking down; the sea flooding the island, and so forth, that they all come back post-haste."

"Has King Rufus planted those oats yet?" we next inquired.

"Not a rod. The grey mare is dead—got cast in a dyke, I believe. But, good-bye, you fellows, I've got a most important appointment at twelve o'clock."

Dundas hates discussing the merits of his bailiff.

A MORNING ON THE MARSHES



S I was sitting over the fire in my bachelor quarters, smoking and listening to the roar of the equinoctial gale amongst the chimneys, and the patter of the rain against the windows, I received a letter from my friend, Jack H——, inviting me to shoot with him on a certain small east-coast marshland island on the following Wednesday.

Only too glad of an excuse to escape from smoky, muddy old London for a day amongst the fowl of the marshes, I immediately despatched a reply to the effect that I would leave Liverpool Street by the five-thirty train on Tuesday evening.

The appointed day came at last, slowly but surely, as all pleasant and long-looked-for days do come, and a good hour before sunrise H—— and myself might have been seen bowling along the fifteen miles or so of russet-tinted, bracken and bramble-fringed road which lay between my host's charming Georgian manor-house and

the marshland island upon which we were that day to shoot. The old Irish mare that drew us knew how to use her legs, however, both in the hunting-field and on the road, and the sun had only just commenced to rise above the eastern sky-line as we crossed the headland or entrance to the vast stretch of perfectly level sands, across which, guided thither by a line of beacons, we had to drive a distance of five miles ere Reedly Island was reached; but, fortunately, the receding tide had left the beacon-road high and dry, thereby enabling us to proceed on our way without delay.

The rising sun heralded in a glorious autumnal morning, and a magnificent seascape lay before us as we entered the sands. To south, east, and west, almost as far as one could see, stretched mile after mile of yellow, treacherous sands, upon the serrated edge of which broke, with a sound of thunder, the white-capped combers of the North Sea. Far away to the southward the hazy blue heights of Kent were dimly visible, and those noted landmarks, the Reculvers Towers, loomed high and gaunt above the distant coast-line.

Stately liners, lofty-sparred sailing ships, and rusty-sided tramp steamers, were to be seen passing up and down the fairway, homeward or outward bound. The rich-tanned sails of innumerable coasting vessels and fishing craft, together with the snowy canvas of yachts of different rigs and ratings, dotted here and there over the blue tide, all lent their touch of colour to the beautiful panorama: and the lights and shades of the early

morning would have gladdened the heart of the painter or poet.

The low-lying country bordering the sands on the north was very Dutch-like in appearance, and consisted of many thousands of acres of perfectly flat marshes, which were encompassed by high sea-walls and intersected by deep and wide dykes and fleets. A clump of stunted elms, a red-tiled homestead, or a reed-thatched barn, were the only objects to break the wearying monotony of the scene.

The old bailiff and his two stalwart sons had watched for the coming of H—— and myself from the headland of the island since dawn; for those worthy sons of the marshes "dearly loike a bit o' shootin', and no mistake."

"Good-morning, Togood! I hope breakfast is ready, for we are simply famished after our long drive."

"Ay, ay, Maister H——; t' owd 'ooman be a-frying pork and eggs holy wonderful. Deary me! ye will find a masterful lot of wild duckin the fleets," wheezed out the weather-beaten, asthmatical old marshman, as he walked the mare round to the stable, while H—— and myself repaired to the old-world, oaken-wainscotted kitchen to enjoy the humble, but substantial, breakfast which the goodwife had provided for us.

Having devoured an incredible number of thick rashers of fried salt pork, poached eggs, and slices of delicious home-made bread and butter, to say nothing of sundry mugs of tea, a goodly number of cartridges, loaded with a well-known "nitro" and Nos. 6 and 8 shot,

were transferred from the magazines to bags and given to the bailiff's sons, who eagerly volunteered to carry the slain, ammunition, etc. The 12-bores were next taken from their cases, and, accompanied by the bearers and a brace of well-broken, black, curly-coated retrievers, my host and myself set out across the marshes to kill something.

"You'd best work along the dykes afore trying the fleets, gentlemen, for I know there be a tidy few duck in the reedy dykes, and any birds you do miss will certain sure make for the fleets."

Young Togood's remark, though unsolicited, was wise. H—— and myself, therefore, separated, he electing to try a wide sedge-fringed boundary dyke which ran into the head of the big fleet, while I took old Grouse to work a somewhat smaller irrigation channel that wormed its serpentine course along the base of the sea-wall.

I had not yet arrived at my dyke when the double report of H——'s gun rang out, awakening the dead silence that reigned over the marshes, for the morning was still very young and not even the bark of a shepherd's dog or the lowing of a cow was to be heard.

Looking in the direction whence the firing proceeded, I saw four duck, one of them evidently hard hit, heading straight for a gateway through which I happened to be passing. Now, even the keenest sighted and most wary of wildfowl will sometimes approach within shot of a man standing by a gate-post, though a good portion of his

anatomy may show both above and beyond the post. But let even the crown of that man's head appear above the densest clump of reed-cover that ever flourished on marsh or fen, and I warrant those same wary fowl will turn quickly to the "right about" long enough before they have flown within range of his gun, be it what bore it may. Aware of this fact, I motioned Grouse to heel, and making myself as small as possible, I anxiously watched the flight of the mallard. On and on they came, still heading towards me. Suddenly the "pricked" bird, which had been gradually lagging behind its fellows, dropped like a stone into a patch of dry rushes, and, before he could be restrained, away went Grouse to retrieve it. Upon sighting the dog the remaining three ducks turned off left-handed, but, although quite sixty-five yards off, the leading bird offered such a tempting crossing-shot that I pulled, and somewhat to my surprise he fell with a wing down.

Having gathered H——'s cripple, the dog went to retrieve my own, a young, but fat, mallard in immature plumage, which my henchman immediately despatched with a bite through the head, remarking, as he performed that delicate operation, "Doubt he 'ont quack no more, master."

We had scarcely commenced working the dyke when Grouse stood to a clump of rank grass growing under the sea-wall, and the next moment a big hare jumped up from under the old dog's nose, and with "lugs" laid low she raced along the base of the embankment at a pace

that would have tried the mettle of either harrier or greyhound.

"There are precious few hares on the island, and those few I would leave for stock," were H——'s last words to me. Mistress Lepus, therefore, went away unscathed, much to the disgust of the retriever, who looked up at me with liquid and wonderfully human-like eyes, as though to say, "Let another hare go like that and I'll surely chase it."

From time to time the report of my friend's gun reached me. Not a feather did I move, however, until quite two-thirds of the length of the dyke had been worked out. Then, with a great to-do, seven wild duck got up within a dozen yards of me. I was not prepared for such a sudden spring of fowl, for, owing either to poor scent or to some other unknown cause, old Grouse (as true a dog as ever was whelped) had passed the growth of sedges wherein the duck must have harboured, and was working a good twenty yards higher up the dyke. How I managed to make a clean miss with my first barrel will ever remain a mystery to me, for that bunch of mallard rose in a heap. But miss them clean I did, and only succeeded in winging one with my second barrel, which dropped on the saltings lying outside the sea-wall, and led the dog a merry dance amongst the many guts and runnels before it allowed itself to be captured. The rest of the bunch, after circling round the marshes, passed over the creek to the neighbouring island, while I, thoroughly disgusted at the manner in which I was

shooting, proceeded towards the fleet. I had not gone fifty yards on my way when Grouse, after "feathering" round a patch of dry rushes, flushed a covey of thirteen partridges, a brace of which were added to the bag. Indeed, it would have been difficult for the veriest tyro to have muffed such an easy right and left as those little brown birds afforded.

Suddenly I heard the far-reaching call of a redshank, which appeared to come from the saltings close by, and motioning young Togood to put the slip on the dog and to remain silent, I commenced to crawl noiselessly up the rough side of the escarpment, pushing my gun before me. At length my head was on a level with the top of the wall, and keeping my face well screened behind a tall growth of sword grass, I brought a pair of binoculars to bear on every patch of ooze and muddy runnel that seemed likely to harbour the wader. Beyond a small flock of black-headed gulls and a few old Royston crows, which quartered every foot of the mud and salt marshes for dead fish and other offal thrown up by the last flood tide, there was not a sign of bird life to be seen anywhere: and the hoarse cries of the gulls alone broke the quietude of the morning.

"Gone!" thought I; but even as the thought flashed through my mind, again I heard the "te-u-ke, te-u-ke" of a redshank. Half a minute later a couple of these birds rose from a deep winding gut within easy shot of me, and, like a pair of feathered hooligans, away they sped over the saltings, shrieking and scolding

as the *Totanus* family alone know how to scold and shriek.

To snatch up my gun and spring to the top of the wall for firmer footing was but the work of a moment. Once more, however, the powder in my right barrel was "crooked," but—probably more by luck than judgment—I succeeded in stopping one of the birds with my left, which dropped into the creek and immediately commenced swimming for all he was worth towards a dense patch of sea-lavender and salinacious plants growing on the far side of the waterway. The retriever was slipped and over the sea-wall in a trice, and a few moments later he brought the beautiful and still lively wader to me, with scarcely a feather of its delicately pencilled plumage ruffled. "One more owd varmint of a tuke the less to go a-shrieking and a-cussing up the cricks and over the sludge flats, to tell all the curloos and ducks for miles around that the gunners be a-coming," grinned Togood, who, as an ardent shore-shooter, hated the redshank most cordially, for the very simple and sufficient reason that the bird has an unhappy knack of warning every feathered inhabitant on marsh, creek, or ooze-flat of the approach of a punt-gunner or shooter. With the exception of a wary old grey coot, which rose from a clump of sedges far out of shot, not a "feather" was moved during the remainder of the beat along the dyke, and my bag up to this time was a very meagre one.

Soon after arriving at the head of the big fleet, H—— joined me, and upon comparing notes I found that he

had already scored six mallard, a water-rail, and a rabbit to his credit. "I rather fancy you will have to hold a bit straighter, if you mean to lick me this morning," remarked my fellow-fowler, as he examined my bag somewhat contemptuously. I rather fancied so, too, but made no reply.

The larger of the two fleets on Reedly Island is about three-quarters of a mile in length, and perhaps eighty yards wide, either shore being heavily fringed with tall reeds and sedges, which afford splendid harbourage to different kinds of waterfowl, and during the winter some rare species of both ducks and divers visit the fleet.

"If you have no objection, I will take the left-hand side of the fleet, for I can feel a confounded twinge of gout in my right foot; and, as you are aware, there are fewer grips and feeders on that side," remarked H—— to me, as he put a couple of cartridges into the chambers of his gun, preparatory to making a fresh start. Now, although I did not mention the fact, I hate shooting from the right-hand shore of the fleet, for, owing to some unknown reason, I invariably experience ill luck when taking that beat. Nor was Dame Fortune a whit kinder to me on that particular morning, as will presently be shown.

The retrievers had not been working in the reed-cover many minutes when an old mallard rose close to H——, who immediately cut it down with the first barrel. Scarcely had the report of the shot died away than I heard a great flapping of wings, accompanied by loud quacking, in the reeds ahead of me, and a few moments

"I RATHER FANCY YOU WILL HAVE TO HOLD A BIT STRAIGHTER"

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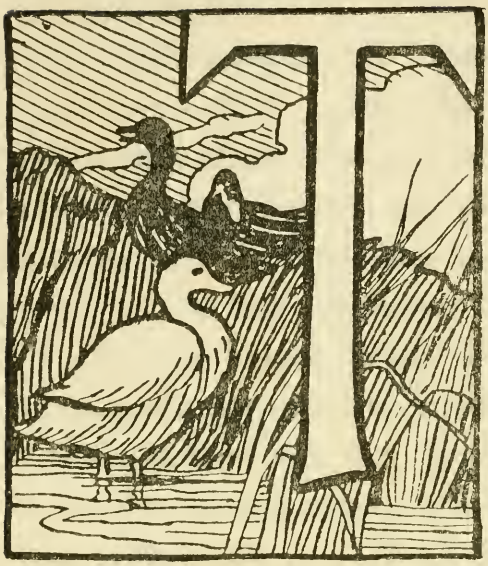
later a paddling of ten or a dozen ducks got up in a bunch within twenty yards. The bustle in the sedges put me on the *qui vive*, and, aiming at a bird flying in the centre of the closely packed bunch, I pulled the trigger, expecting to see at least a brace of fat wild duck drop to the contents of the right barrel. An ominous click, however, told its own tale of a miss-fire. With a muttered "blessing" on the head of the man who made that faulty cartridge, I turned to get in the second barrel, but, to my unspeakable disgust, I saw that the duck were heading straight for H——, who, of necessity, was in the direct line of fire. "Why on earth didn't you shoot, man?" coolly asked my facetious friend, after neatly dropping a couple of my duck. My reply will not bear repeating.

Duck after duck, sometimes singly, and sometimes in small bunches, were sprung by H——, who killed each time he fired. Indeed, I do not believe he missed three birds during the whole morning, whereas I obtained but three shots during the beat along the big fleet, and added but one duck, and a miserable specimen of a coot, to my bag, against eight and a half couple of duck, a leash of coot and a moorhen, shot by my companion.

It would be dull work for my readers were I to dwell on the fact of how this duck was killed, how that missed, how they rose or how they fell. Sufficient to say, the fleets and dykes of the marshland yielded their full complement of mallard and coot.

A NIGHT'S BIG GUNNING



THE church clock was striking the hour of midnight as Caleb Gilson, the professional wild-fowler, and myself walked down to the jetty, alongside which was moored the double-handed gunning-punt.

"Call me a Dutchman if this b'ain't a master night for gunnin'! I'd give a day's catch o' herrin' to heve the owd staunchion gun aboard," exclaimed the jersey-clad giant, as he pointed to a broad silvery belt of light thrown by the full moon athwart the grey waters of the wide estuary.

It was indeed an ideal night, or, rather, morning, for fowling. The tide was almost as smooth as the proverbial sea of oil, the light northerly wind was just what we required to sail the double-handed punt, under her small lug-sail, to the fowling grounds amongst the ooze-flats and salt-marshes surrounding O—— Island: and, last, but by no means least, the cloud-flecked face of the moon cast sufficient light to render birds visible, as they paddled

on the tide, or nimbly quartered the ooze-flats in search of food.

But it is time to embark, for my honest friend and fellow fowler has already launched the punt, and gotten all the paraphernalia aboard. With the handkerchief-like balance-lug sail bellying to the breeze, we draw slowly away from the little quay, which is piled high with empty fish-trunks and baskets, and is redolent of herrings, sprats, and other ancient and fish-like odours. The tide has only just commenced to flow, and there are barely six inches of water under our flat-bottomed and somewhat crank craft. Very soon, however, we enter a narrow gut which runs into a more important waterway, used by local fishermen as a haven in which to moor their smacks. Suddenly, with an uncanny croak, a heron rises like a grey phantom from a spit of slob, within a dozen yards of the punt, and away over the tide he flaps, the moonbeams silvering his great fan-like wings.

At the passing of the heron I take the 8-bore from its canvas case, and, having inserted a cartridge loaded with black powder and No. 4 shot, I rest the long barrel of the gun on the fore-coaming, and carefully scan the uncovered flats lying on the starboard hand. The moon being directly ahead of the punt, every object lying within range of the heavy shoulder gun was easily discernible from the low-sided craft. Moonlight is very deceptive, however, and more than once I was very nearly pulling at a bunch of dunlin, having mistaken the little waders for worthier fowl.

We had not started on our voyage of discovery long when the capful of air died away almost to a dead calm. Then my stalwart companion lowered the sail and commenced to propel the punt, noiselessly but swiftly, by means of the setting-pole, and, although we were passing over the very shallowest of shoals, ground was never once touched. From time to time the weird, albeit musical, cry of a curlew, the shrill call of a redshank, or the strange "mewing" of a lapwing, reached our ears from the neighbouring flats, and more than once the merry cackle of a bunch of mallard, travelling high overhead, was heard. I sighted nothing, however, until the rugged headland of W—— loomed high and gaunt above the rippleless tide on the port bow. Then it was that I noticed a number of large birds quartering a tongue of ooze which extended from a patch of saltings down to the water's edge.

"Curloos," was the laconic whisper of Gilson, whose keen and well-tried eyes had probably sighted the herd of curlew long before my own.

On and on crept the low, grey, wicked-looking craft, nearer and nearer to the long-billed, and, apparently, unsuspecting birds, until the nearest of them were well within range of the 8-bore. With a great to-do, and giving vent to a piercing "cur-leew!" of alarm, up got one of the sentinels. The warning came too late, however, for, pulling into a bunch of five of the curlew as they rose in a "heap," a couple dropped dead as stones, while a third, with a wing down, after struggling to the water's edge, fell

on its side and lay kicking spasmodically on the knee-deep mud.

"Masterful purty shot that wor, sir, and Oi couldn't heve done it much better meself," graciously vouchsafed my companion, as he fastened on his mud-pattens before venturing across the treacherous slob to gather the slain.

Having retrieved the fowl, and very carefully washed the mud from the pattens with mop and icy sea-water, Gilson again took his place in the stern, and, with powerful strokes of the setting-pole, he skilfully navigated the punt round the headland and into the mouth of a small tidal river or creek, from the salting and ooze-flat-fringed shores of which we hoped to pick up a few waders, with, perchance, a mallard, widgeon, or teal to boot.

Keeping well into the left-hand shore of the creek, Gilson poled, with unerring skill, clear of every jut of salting, tongue of slob, and black-ground. Every few minutes he would stop in his poling to listen to the calls of the various kinds of wildfowl which were borne down to us on the "cat's-paws" of wind.

"Hark 'ee, maister! Do ye hear they widgeon?" suddenly asked my companion, in a whisper.

Notwithstanding that the early morning was as silent as the grave, I failed to distinguish the shrill whistle of a widgeon from the varied calls of the waders inhabiting the creek. Suddenly, however, the unmistakable and welcome "whe-oh" came to my ears, and, apparently, at no great distance from the punt. The call put me more on

the "lookout" than ever, and, peering forward, I anxiously watched for the appearance of the fowl. Fortunately, what little breeze there was came from abeam, and the widgeon, being well ahead, were, therefore, unable to scent us. The moon was also ahead of the punt, and although she illuminated the tide before us, we were, naturally, obscured from the keen-sighted fowl; and so well did Thomas understand his work that the punt moved through the water as silently as a drifting log.

After several minutes of anxious watching, five dim forms emerged from a muddy gut, which, after worming its sinuous course through many acres of saltings, ran into the creek at a point some thirty yards beyond the punt. Now, unfortunately, my sight is not so good as it used to be, and, uncertain as to whether the forms in question were blobs of spume, bunches of seaweed, or widgeon, I hesitated before firing; but a "Why don't 'ee pull, maister?" from the puntsman set at rest any doubts which I might have entertained on this point. Aiming at a couple of the duck swimming almost wing to wing, I pulled, and as the smoke of the heavy charge of black powder cleared away, I saw both lying paddles upward on the tide. The 8-bore was but single-barrelled, otherwise I might, perhaps, have got another successful shot into the little company of widgeon.

"Why didn't you shoot?" I asked Gilson, as he laid done his undischarged 10-bore muzzle-loader on the floor of the punt.

"The blazin' owd iron wor only at half-cock, and

afore Oi could get the hammers up, the fowl wor out o' the light," was the fowler's disgusted reply.

Having picked up the widgeon, the puntsman once again proceeded to pole noiselessly up along, while I kept a bright lookout. Nothing was met with, however, and shortly after three o'clock A.M., having lain prone on the hard floor of the gunning-punt for over three hours, and with the thermometer registering several degrees of frost, I suggested to Gilson that we should change places. He agreed readily enough to the proposal, and, crawling aft, I, to the best of my ability, commenced to propel the punt with the setting-pole. My knowledge of the geography of the creek was somewhat limited, however, and very soon we were hard and fast aground; and not until the punt was lightened of her crew were we enabled to float her off.

" 'Twill be dawn in a couple of hours, sir, and by your leave, I'll go pres'ly over to t'owd gunnin'-pit on the P'int salts and lay up for the mornin' flight; theer's safe to be a few duck come over from H—— mushes," said Gilson, after we had hauled the punt off the mud. " Like as not t'owd pit 'ull be water-logged and main uncomfortable to sit in," he went on, in an apologetic kind of manner, thinking, possibly, that he was depriving me of a very excellent opportunity.

On this point I very soon set his mind at rest, in declaring my intention to try the fleet of a small marsh lying about half-a-mile higher up the creek, from the owner of which I had received permission to shoot thereon.

Landing Gilson on the saltings, I poled up to T—— marsh, and, running the punt in a muddy little gut which ran almost up to the sea-wall, I climbed over the embankment, and made my way across a big lucerne marsh to a wide sedge-fringed dyke, which I knew would lead me to the fleet. I had not proceeded far when the "scape, scape" of a snipe put me on the alert, and I caught a fleeting glimpse of the long bill as he flashed across the moonbeams. Snipe-shooting by the light of the moon is not my forte, however, and Master Longbill got away without the loss of a single feather. From time to time the cackle of passing mallard, or the doleful calls of a bunch of peewits, came to me, and the "trumpeting" of what must have been a great herd of brent geese, travelling coastwards, gladdened my ears; but my eyes saw them not.

At length the fleet lay before me, glistening under the moonbeams; a row of stunted and grotesquely-grown willows fringing the right-hand shore of the water. So wonderfully illuminated was the fleet that every object floating upon its surface was easily discernible. But beyond a few coots and moorhens, there were apparently no fowl on the more open parts of the water. I therefore decided to work the left-hand shore, there being more reed-cover on that side.

Brushing the tall, waving sedges with the barrels of my gun as I walked, I expectantly waited for something worthy powder and shot to get up. Beyond a couple of "bald-heads" which got up behind me, and consequently out of the moonlight—the moon was right ahead of me—

not a feather moved until I reached a narrow part of the fleet. Then, with a great to-do, a bunch of mallard rose from a dense clump of reeds within a dozen yards of me. The duck were flying straight away, and holding, as I imagined, dead on to the leader, I pulled. He went away apparently unscathed, however, and a loud—and, I need hardly say, unexpected—yell of, "Mind where ye be a-shootin' to!" from somewhere close at hand, so "put me off" that I also muffed with my second barrel.

Cussing my bad shooting and overstrung nerves, I walked up the fleet until arriving at a little sedge-grown bay, where I found the marsh bailiff and his son seated in a leaky old punt, "bobbing" for eels.

I very soon learned that the marshmen had disturbed any fowl which might have inhabited the remaining length of the fleet, by poling their clumsy craft along the same. To have taken further trouble with the water would, under such conditions, have proved futile, and, having made glad the hearts and stomachs of the eel-fishers with a wee drappie of Scotch whisky from my flask, I retraced my footsteps to the gut wherein I had moored the punt.

For a long hour did I sit, gun in hand, in that muddy little rill, with never so much as seeing a dunlin even, and I was in the act of pushing into the creek when the cackle of a mallard caused me to drop the setting-pole and to grab up the cripple-stopper. Fortunately, my head, as I crouched in the punt, was well below the top of the gully; and very soon the whistling of pinions greeted my ears. Looking upwards, I saw a bunch of ten or twelve

mallard, flying at no great height, and clean over my head. Holding, as I imagined, well in front of the leader, I fired. But, to my disgust, he went on as though he rather liked it, and I only succeeded in winging a young mallard with my second barrel, which fluttered on to the ooze and led me a merry—and, I might add, particularly muddy—dance across the same ere I captured him.

The morning flight was now over, but, thinking it possible that I might get a shot into a trip of shanks, or grey plover, passing down creek on their way to the flats and black grounds lying outside, which were already beginning to show above the receding tide, I spent another half-hour of chilly solitude in the muddy gut. But never a feather came within range, and, as my haven of refuge began to empty with the ebb tide very rapidly, I pushed into the main stream and quietly poled down to the Point Saltings, where I found Gilson awaiting me with a red-headed pochard, a couple of curlew, and an ancient, disreputable-looking carrion crow.

"A leash o' birds be a wholly unlucky bag, so I shot that owd varmint of a 'parson' [carrion crow], jest to make the even number, loike," grinned the superstitious fowler, as he poled the punt along the tortuous swatchway towards the still sleeping fishing village.

FROM THE PAGES OF AN OLD MAGAZINE

WHILST roaming amongst the musty second-hand bookstalls in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn Fields, a few months ago, I had the good fortune to pick up, at the cost of a few shillings, a perfectly sound copy of that somewhat scarce work, "Adams' Royal Geographical Magazine," published in 1793. The volume is beautifully illustrated with woodcuts, and contains a good deal of matter interesting to the naturalist and sportsman. I therefore quote a few quaint extracts from the yellow, time-discoloured leaves of the old book.

In Chapter X., under the heading "England," the first paragraph that attracted my attention ran as follows:—

"Among the animal productions of England the horse stands foremost. That noble and generous animal is found in this country in great variety and perfection; indeed, all the valuable qualities of the Arabian, the Turkish, the Spanish and other foreign horses, are united

in that of England, owing to the incredible pains taken by all ranks of men, from the prince to the peasant, for improving the species. Vast numbers of horses are bred in England, and so many sold into foreign countries, that their exportation is now become a considerable branch of commerce. The strength, courage, swiftness, and intrepidity of the English horse is so well known on the continent of Europe that every prince is desirous of having them in his army. Those which draw equipages in the streets of London are often particularly beautiful."

The next paragraph should interest and open the eyes of the modern bulldog and mastiff breeder :—

"We must not omit to mention among the animals peculiar to England the mastiffs and bulldogs, as being far superior to those of any other country, both with regard to strength and courage. They will engage any animal, and generally come off victorious. The lion himself is unable to intimidate them, and two of these dogs being, by order of King James I., turned loose upon one of the most dreadful lions in the Tower, they laid him on his back; but a still more surprising circumstance attending these creatures is that this innate courage degenerates in foreign countries. Nor is this change peculiar to these dogs. The same is observed with regard to the English game-cocks, so famous here for their ferocity and courage."

Having read the above extract, one instinctively wonders what King James's "most dreadful" lion was doing when Messrs Mastiff and Bulldog laid him on his

back. Possibly we have a different "strain" of lions nowadays.

"The rest of the mammals of England" (remarks Adams) "are nearly the same with those of other countries, as asses, mules, deer, hares, rabbits, weazels, newts, otters, badgers, hedgehogs, pole-cats, mice, moles, etc."

If the eighteenth-century naturalist included the newt amongst the British mammals, why should the frog, toad, and ground-lizard have been left out in the cold?

"England abounds in different sorts of wildfowl, as bustards, wild geese, brent geese, wild ducks, widgeons, teels, pheasants, plovers, partridges, woodcocks, quails, snipes, landrails, wood-pigeons, hawks, buzzards, kites, owls, ravens, herons, crows, rooks, jackdaws, magpies, jays, thrushes, blackbirds, nightingales, goldfinches, bullfinches, larks, linnets, and a prodigious variety of small birds, amongst which the wheatear, a bird peculiar to England, the flesh of which is by many preferred to that of the ortolan, and is reckoned a great delicacy." [So probably was the flesh of such wildfowl as the hawk, buzzard, kite, owl, raven, etc.]

From the above paragraph it would seem that the bustard, quail, and wheatear were plentiful enough in England at the end of the eighteenth century; but why the wheatear, which is a migratory bird, should have been peculiar to England in those days any more than it is to-day is difficult to understand. Adams, however,

did not err in stating that the flesh of the wheatear was reckoned a great delicacy, for a dish of those birds, although they are no larger than sparrows, is food fit for the table of an emperor or an—alderman.

"Few countries in the world can boast of greater variety of fish" (writes Adams). "The rivers and ponds abound in salmon, trout, eels, pike, carp, tench, barble, perch, gudgeons, smelts, roach, dace, plaice, flounders and crawfish. In some of the lakes or meers of Cumberland and Wales is found a very delicate fish called a char; it is of the trout kind, and thought to be peculiar to England. The seas which surround the kingdom are full of cod, mackerel, mullets, base [bass], guardfish [garfish], haddocks, whitings, herrings, pilchards, skaites, turbots, soles, hallibots, and, what are preferred to all others by the voluptuous, John Dories and red mullets."

The voluptuous of those days were evidently not bad judges of the good things of this earth, for, although nowadays the John Dory is seldom seen on the tables of the wealthy, or even of the middle classes, of England, and may often be bought at threepence a pound, it is one of the most delicious of sea-fish. Why it should have so fallen in repute as an article of food is hard to tell. Indeed, but a few weeks ago, one of the best known of London fishmongers, informed me that twenty years ago, so great was the demand for the dory that a small fish often realised half-a-guinea.

Judging from the following paragraph, the capitalists

and fishermen of the eighteenth century were not particularly enterprising, and allowed the Dutch to net round their coasts under their very eyes.

"The fisheries of England, though capable of being carried on to great advantage, are sadly neglected, notwithstanding their utility has been so often pointed out (particularly by reducing the high price of butcher's meat), and large sums have been subscribed by the nobility, gentry and merchants. The whale-fishery is, however, prosecuted with advantage, but not with a spirit equal to that of the Dutch, who send more ships to the Greenland seas than all the other nations of Europe put together. In the western counties of Devon and Cornwall the pilchard fishery is pursued with some spirit and success; but that for herrings, which might prove a great national benefit, languishes to such a degree that it can hardly be said to exist. The turbot-fishery, which might also be very advantageous to the nation, is wholly neglected; so that the large quantities of that fish daily seen in the markets of London during the season, are caught by the Dutch on our own coasts and sold to English boats sent off for that purpose, which easily accounts for its dearness, whereby the lower-class of people are entirely deprived of that agreeable food. Some years ago, indeed, there was a pleasing prospect that the herring-fishery would be carried on with a spirit adequate to its importance. Large sums were subscribed, a company was formed, nets were made, busses were fitted out, and every method adopted for rendering the attempt successful; but by some unexpected events, yet unknown, this national undertaking miscarried, though

some ascribed the failure of it to the expense of bringing the commodity to market. However, we still hope that other projects for carrying on this fishery, and those on our coasts in general, will be formed, to which every lover of his country will wish success."

In his description of Scotland and its islands, Adams remarks :—

"Most of the birds and fishes common to the Northern countries are to be found here, besides which here is a species of falcon [1] or hawk of a more docile nature than any that are found elsewhere. Plenty of red deer, partridges, growse, heath-cock and plover, are found on the heaths and commons, and the waters abound in duck, teel and widgeon.

"The sea, besides whales, seals and otters, furnishes the inhabitants with cod, ling, tusk, herrings, crabs, oysters, remarkably large mussels and cockles. The rocks are covered with eagles, hawks, kites, wild geese, solan geese, barnacles, limpets and other species of wildfowl."

The barnacle and limpet are not included amongst the British wildfowl of to-day ; neither are the rocks in Scotland covered with eagles and such-like wildfowl—at least, they were not when last we journeyed North.

"The lakes of Scotland are almost innumerable, the inhabitants sometimes giving the name of loch or lake to an arm of the sea ; which is the case of Loch Fyn, famous for

[1] Probably the peregrine falcon.

its excellent herrings,[1] it being fifty miles long by four broad. Loch An, Loch Lomond and Loch Tay present us with the most beautiful scenes, and their banks, like many others, are adorned with woods. Near Lochness, on the top of a hill, two miles in perpendicular height, is a lake of fresh water, about 180 feet in length, unfathomable, and remarkable, for never having been known to freeze; whereas Loch Anwyn, or Green Lake, which is not above seventeen miles distant from it, is perpetually covered with ice. The Loch of Spinie, near Elgin, is frequented by dreadful large flights of swans and cygnets, which are sometimes so numerous as to cause a sudden darkness in the air. Their fondness for this spot is, with great appearance of reason, attributed to their feeding on the plant Olorina, which grows in the lake and rises above the water with a long, straight stalk, bearing a cluster of seeds at the top," etc. etc.

Many other interesting and curious extracts might be borrowed from the pages of this quaint old work; but methinks I hear the readers cry, "Hold! enough."

[1] Loch Fyne herrings are still famous for their large size.

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